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OR, The Matchless-Detective's Swell Job.

A Romance of the Cosmopolitan Express Car Mystery.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "OLD GRIP," "SPRINGSTEEL STEVE,"
"THE HURRICANE DETECTIVE," "THE
CIRCUS DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN EXPRESS CAR TRAGEDY.

"HERE is the underwear you forgot to take with you, Hal. I knew you would miss it when you got to Boston, and so hurried after you with the grip-sack."

In response to these low-spoken, half-breathless words, Harry Borden, trusted railway messenger of the Cosmopolitan Express Co., between New York and Boston, looked up with a

"WHO WAS THAT WOMAN WHO STABBED YOU?" DEMANDED FALCONBRIDGE. "I SHA'N'T TELL YOU!" THE WORDS WERE RESOLUTE BUT FAINTLY SPOKEN.

pleased expression at the trim feminine figure who had just stepped hurriedly into the Express car, then on the point of starting on its eastern trip, in which he was busily engaged with the packages under his charge when thus interrupted.

"Come now, that's mighty good of you, little wife, especially after our hard words of this morning," he replied, taking the proffered grip-sack from her hand. "I hope you'll have the kiss of peace ready for me by my return tomorrow. Be quick now!" there was a sudden jolt of the car-couplings. "In three seconds we'll be off."

He could only catch a glimpse of the lower part of her face, as he saw her about to jump from the wide-open sliding side-door, and then turned toward the iron treasure-safe which he had left open at arm's-length, and in which he had not quite deposited all his money-packets at the moment of the interruption.

Then—but, what could have happened, and what was the matter with Express Messenger Harry Borden?

The train had started, with the car sliding-door and even the safe-door still neglectfully unclosed, and here he was staggering blindly about the interior like a drunken man.

But, Hal Borden was not drunk. He had experienced a strange sort of shock between the shoulder-blades just after turning away from Susie, his pretty wife, as he thought; his clothing was rapidly becoming saturated with his own blood; and doubtless, he would quickly lose consciousness, leaving the treasure-box defenseless.

"What could it all mean? Hazy, hazy, hazy, everything! Surely his own Susie could not have stabbed him in the back? Besides, even granting the preposterous possibility of such a thing, would there have been time and opportunity? Hasier, hazier, hazier! Where was that particular ten-thousand dollar package which he had been just on the point of thrusting into the safe when she spoke to him, but had retained in his hand while speaking to her in return and taking the grip-sack? Hasier still—almost a thick, continuous cloud now! It was no longer in his grasp. Good God! he must find it, he must recover it at once; otherwise he was a ruined, a disgraced man! But, had he really held it in his hand, that fateful package? "Yes, no; no, yes! Blackness of darkness! He lurched forward on his face, narrowly missing falling off the now rapidly-moving train—a blood-stained, pitiable spectacle—and knew no more.

In the mean time, the yard gatekeeper, to whom the messenger's wife was well known by sight, by reason of her frequent visits to the yard on her husband's account, in the past, had drawn back the heavy lattice gate to permit of the trim figure's hurried egress, and was looking after her, in company with a quiet, medium-sized, capable-appearing man, who had also seemed to recognize the woman.

"Hal Borden's wife, eh?" queried the latter.

"Yes, Mr. Falconbridge, was the reply. "And, capital man as Hal is, he ought to feel proud of her, for a prettier, neater and more worthy little woman than Susie Borden, who just tripped so nimbly past us, I hardly believe can be found on Manhattan Island to-day. But, what are you looking so puzzled about?"

"About Susie's walk. It doesn't look altogether natural, and, as I've known her since she was a child at school—however, she's turned the corner at last, and I suppose there's no accounting for the new-fangled gaits the young women are adopting nowadays. Hump!"

And the speaker—who was none other than Major Jack Falconbridge, the Falcon Detective—stepped through the gate—reopened again at that moment, to let one of the yard-hands through—and secured a small bright object from the muddy sidewalk which the young woman might have dropped in passing.

The action, besides being apparently insignificant in itself, was not noticed by Mike Dalton, the gatekeeper, who was at that instant gazing in open-mouthed surprise at the train containing the Express car which was at this juncture, after a preliminary toot or two from the engine, rapidly pulling out of the yard.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Dalton; "what's amiss with Hal Borden, the Express messenger?"

"What makes you think there's aught amiss with him?" and Falconbridge came back through the gate.

"Why, there went his close car just this minute, with the sliding-door still wide open at the side, as if for a fresh-air picnic! And I'm a Dutchman if I didn't catch a glimpse of him stumbling and staggering about the inside of it."

"Some mistake, I guess, Mike," and the detective grew thoughtful. "Hal Borden never drinks, to my certain knowledge."

"So I've always thought. But my eyes couldn't have deceived me. I'd swear to it!"

"Well, I suppose we shall see or hear more of it!"

Both men grew concerned for the time being, for Borden was a general favorite about the train yard of the Grand Central, as pretty much everywhere else in which his sterling

qualities were known at their worth, and there were few if any but would have been saddened to learn of his slightest lapse from the path of duty.

But they were not long in being enlightened as to the true state of the case.

It was a fast special train with which the Express car under consideration was connected, making in the run between New York and Boston but few stoppages, of which Stamford, Connecticut, was the first.

In a little more than an hour after the outset of the trip, a startling telegram was received by the Cosmopolitan Express Co., officials and the chief railroad authorities, from Stamford, with whose purport nearly every one employed about the great depot was speedily acquainted.

It was to the following effect:

"3 P. M. Special just in. Express Messenger Borden found to have been murdered and doubtless robbed of a \$10,000 package. Agent Cliff now in charge of car. No delay. Particulars later."

The sentiment of horror and sympathy created by this intelligence among Harry Borden's numerous friends and well-wishers about the depot was so great that nobody could be found who would consent to carry the news to the unfortunate young man's wife.

Half-an-hour later, there were not wanting those who were indignantly willing to, notwithstanding that there was a perceptible mitigation of mourning on the Express messenger's account.

This seemingly paradoxical change of public sentiment was brought about by a second dispatch received after that interval, as follows:

"Borden still alive, though extremely weak. May possibly pull through. Was stabbed in back just before train drew out of G. C. D. yard. Arrest the person—probably a woman—last seen with him there."

Mike Dalton and Old Falcon were again in conversation shortly after the substance of this second telegram became known.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the former; "what do you think of it, major?"

"Haven't determined yet."

"Do you still believe that my eyes deceived me as to Borden's odd actions just as the train was pulling out?"

"No; he had doubtless already received the stab."

"And I was so ungenerous as to deem him possibly drunk," remorsefully. "Poor Hal!"

"Let us hope for the best as to him. But—as to some one else?"

The eyes of the two men met in a curiously questioning, yet startled, gaze.

"Good Lord! Falconbridge, I know it, no less than yourself. She was the last person seen with him, the very last!"

"True."

"He must have received the murderous blow the instant after, or at the very moment of their parting!"

"True, again."

"But, Falconbridge, I can not believe Susie Borden capable of such a deed!"

"Neither can I, and neither shall I. She could never have done it!"

Just then Jim Latham, the chief special detective officer detailed for duty at the Grand Central, came.

"I am going to carry the news to Borden's wife, Falconbridge," he remarked, with a significant look. "Will you go along?"

"Yes," was the reply; and they went off together.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXPRESS MESSENGER'S WIFE.

The Borden residence was a snug cottage in Yorkville, within less than twenty minutes' brisk walk from the depot.

Hal Borden was twenty-eight, his wife twenty-four. The couple were without children, though two had been born to them, only to pass away in their infancy. When the head of the house was at home, the household comprised, besides the young couple themselves, Miss Fanny Elmore, an elderly maiden sister of Mrs. Susie Borden, Janet Douglas, a young Scottish maid-of-all-work, and Frank Parsons, their lodger.

The last mentioned person was an old schoolmate of Borden's, though considerably older than the latter, and esteemed as a most intimate friend by Susie, no less than by her husband.

Parsons was an engineering draughtsman by profession, but was vaguely understood to be in more or less independent circumstances, with considerable leisure at his command.

It was after dark, at the close of a dull autumnal day when Latham and Falconbridge made their call.

Mrs. Borden was putting supper on the table in the one large apartment which temporarily answered for parlor and dining-room during the fall house-cleaning, while her sister, Miss Fanny, looking tired and worn out, was resting herself over some knitting in the great rocking-chair by a cheerful grate-fire.

The former, a fresh-faced, pretty young woman with fluffy light hair, was singing contentedly at her employment, while flitting in and out of the room. Her sister was much the elder,

and presented in her general aspect the not usual family anomaly of resembling the other most strikingly, and yet of being undeniably the handsomer and more impressive in almost every regard.

Susie Borden was pretty; Miss Fanny was beautiful.

Both were well acquainted with Falconbridge, and both he and Latham, whom they now saw for the first time, were cordially welcomed, with an invitation to remain for supper almost in the first breath.

Even when Latham was mentioned as being the chief detective official at the depot, nothing out of the common run seemed so much as suspected, though the demeanor of both women was being covertly criticised to the full.

Latham, who was a pretty good sort of fellow, found an early opportunity to nudge his companion, as much as to say: "There can be nothing in this charge. Good Lord! what am I to do?"

Falconbridge, therefore, broke the ice for him.

"My dear Mrs. Borden," he said, with much gravity, at last, "you have probably remarked my friend Latham here and myself as not—er—

appearing in the best of spirits?"

"I do now!" She looked up, with an empty platter still in her hands, and then seemed to take the alarm electrically. "Dear me, Mr. Falconbridge, what is it? Can—can anything have happened to Harry?"

"In the first place, ma'm," slightly reassuringly, "pray tell me if you haven't had an impression that something might have happened to him."

"Heavens, no! Speak, sir! Oh, I am sure," with a swiftly paling face, "something has happened to him—I see it in your eyes! Quick, tell me at once! We had a little tiff, as they say, when he parted from me directly after dinner, and now—Oh! why do you not relieve my suspense?"

Miss Fanny had also paused in her crocheting and looked up in a startled way, but with more self-containment than her sister.

"Do compose yourself, ma'm!" continued the Falcon Detective, heartily wishing himself anywhere else. "Before answering, Susie, I must ask you if that was your last meeting with Hal."

"Certainly," with perfect naturalness. "I have not, as a matter of course, seen or heard anything of him since."

"He hadn't forgotten anything, eh—a grip-sack, or something of the sort—necessitating your visiting him in his car, later on, just as the train was about to start?"

"Cerainly not! I haven't quitted the house since this morning. Bless me! I wonder if Hal did forget the grip-sack with his underwear as I warned him against. Janet!"

She called to the servant, perhaps to send her up-stairs with regard to the grip-sack, and then came to a dead stop, her alarm on her husband's account doubtlessly once more mastering her.

Miss Fanny's handsome face, however, had become comparatively set and stern, as if she were bracing herself for the reception of bad news, nothing of all this being lost upon the two men.

"You must tell me!" cried Susie, now fairly stamping her foot. "What has happened to my husband, Mr. Falconbridge? I insist on knowing!"

"He reached Stamford badly hurt," was the blurted out response, "but—he isn't dead yet—in fact, may pull through."

She simply stared at first, the color absolutely deserting her face, the dish in her hand falling to the floor and breaking unheeded.

Falconbridge hurried through what was known of Hal Borden's misfortune without any preliminaries.

The young wife seemed to hear him in a waking dream, frozen in her speechless woe.

Stabbed—robbed—her Hal—now at the point of death, and she not at his side, with that miserably consoling clause, 'He may pull through!'

Her sweet, grief-stricken face was so plainly the index of these natural reflections—successions of shocks, you might say—that the men were no less bewildered than sympathetic.

Guilt in this guise, a husband's blood on such hands? Preposterous! And yet—what had Mike Dalton, the gatekeeper, and Falconbridge himself, together with perhaps others in the train-yard, actually seen?

At last she plumped herself down in a chair, and nature's simplest softener was her first relief. She wept like a thunder-cloud, violently but briefly.

Her sister hurried to her side, while Janet, the strong Scotch girl, who had been brought into the open doorway by the summons of a few moments before, stared open-mouthed.

"This will never do!" Susie dashed aside her tears and sprung to her feet. "Janet, my cloak and hat! And, don't forget my purse; you will find it on the bed in my room. Fanny, shall you go with me to him, or remain here?"

The elder sister seemed to pause, irresolute and momentarily dismayed.

"I shall remain," she decided at last. "Janet is too young to be left alone here. Besides, I can rejoin you at Stamford to-morrow, if you telegraph me that you think it necessary."

Here, however, Latham put a summary veto on these proposed arrangements.

He set his lips firmly, and rose.

"Excuse me, but this cannot be!" he interposed. "Mrs. Borden, recall your servant, please; though it won't matter, as you'll want your cloak and hat after all."

Both women stared at him, while Janet, who had not yet reached the foot of the stairs, retraced her steps.

"Ladies—Mrs. Borden," continued the railroad detective, jerkingly, but with the semi-exasperation of forced resolve, "when a man has an unpleasant duty to perform, it is best to come to the point at once."

"Duty? point at once?"

Both women stared at him in unaffected wonder.

"What are you talking about, sir?" cried Susie. "I am going to my husband just as soon as I can get a train."

"No, ma'm, no! Sorry, but—"

"What do you mean?" And she also looked for an explanation to Falconbridge, who, however, much as his heart bled for her, had become as if molded out of iron—sphinxian for the time being.

"Ma'm, Mrs. Borden, there has been an attempt to murder your husband, and ten thousand dollars have disappeared!"

"Heavens! but oughtn't I to know it by this time?"

"Ma'm—Mrs. Borden—you are suspected!"

Then he sat himself down with a heavy, squashing movement, and secretly mourned that outspoken profanity was interdicted by the presence of ladies.

At first she failed to understand him. Then a low but terrible cry burst from her white lips.

"God of heaven!" she faltered; "do I hear aright? I—suspected—of—attempting—my—husband's life!"

Falconbridge rose, and gravely made her resume the chair from which she had started bolt-upright, while motioning Miss Fanny to likewise go back to her seat.

"There's some awful mystery here," he said. "But, rest assured of this, Mrs. Borden: I believe you perfectly innocent, even against the evidence of my own senses!"

"So do I, by—jingo!" roared out Latham, enthusiastically, "though, of course, my evidence is only from hearsay."

She had now grown more composed.

"What do you mean by such words, major?" she demanded. "Of course I'm innocent, but—against the evidence of your own senses! What do you mean by that?"

"You say you did not see your husband after separating from him at noon, or thereabouts?"

"Of course, I do, since it is the truth."

"And you have not quitted your house since this morning?"

"Not for a moment. Janet here will witness to that." Janet nodded. "So could Fanny, but that she was out for a short time in the afternoon."

"Then," with a despairing gesture, "I'm either bewildered or—or teetotally flabbergasted!"

"Why?"

"Because I saw you enter the train-yard with my own eyes—saw you enter your husband's car and give him a grip-sack—saw you separate from him and hurry away, not ten seconds before the train started and the moment of his being stabbed in the back! And so did Mike Dalton, the gatekeeper!"

Her look of amazement speedily gave way to an assured expression.

"Very wonderful, of course," she said, composedly, though Miss Fanny had started and turned pale. "I must see what other woman is making love to my Hal, after cleverly getting herself up to resemble me! Bring me what I asked for, Janet! I shall accompany these gentlemen at once."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE INSPECTOR'S OFFICE.

No objection being offered, Miss Elmore quietly prepared to accompany her sister.

"Do you imagine," she asked of Falconbridge, while putting on her gloves, "that there will be a—detention?"

"I am in hopes to the contrary," was the reply. "We shall go before Inspector Byrnes, and he will decide. The arrest" (how he hated to use the word in the present instance!) "is so far a mere formula—a charge on suspicion."

While this was going on, Mr. Parsons, the lodger, came in—an unassuming, gentlemanly man of perhaps thirty-four or five, but primarily appearing much younger by reason of his beardlessness, combined with a boyish freshness of complexion, slender and rather understated, and with odd, neutral-tinted eyes that might indicate almost anything, good or bad.

Falconbridge had met him briefly once or twice before; Latham never, until now. Parsons was at once introduced, as an intimate friend, and, on being enlightened as to the situation, at which he seemed to be becomingly shocked, eagerly insisted on being also permit-

ted to accompany the party, which was acceded to.

Fortune favored Susie Borden, for the remainder of that unhappy evening.

It was at the verge of an exciting municipal election, and when the party were ushered into the private office of the Inspector of Police Detective Bureau, he was found in the company of a personal friend who was a police justice, which would tend to give a *quasi-judicial* aspect to the examination that was demanded.

As a matter of course, the inspector was already acquainted with the outlines of the case, Latham being his official subordinate, and the order for arrest having been promptly issued from the bureau at the hasty request of the railroad authorities.

He listened to the statements of the case, as thus far developed, and without comment, though deeply interested.

Then he touched a telegram on his desk, saying:

"The wounded messenger will recover."

Susie clasped her hands in a transport of gratitude, while Miss Fanny remained unmoved, and Mr. Parsons smiled relievedly.

"Here is the latest dispatch, and it is to that effect. Still, no trace of the missing money-package though. He will be able to be removed back to his home to-morrow afternoon. Mr. Falconbridge!"

"Yes, inspector."

Though only a private detective, Falconbridge was well known, and of sterling reputation in official circles.

"You were one of those who recognized this lady at the parting interview with the Express messenger, presumably the instant before the felonious assault upon him was committed?"

"Yes, sir, and no, sir! I could almost have sworn at the time that it was she; and yet, I feel convinced of the truth of her own statement to the contrary."

"Humph! Did you see the face of the woman at the yards?"

"Only the lower half of it!" eagerly. "She wore one of those half-vails coming down to the tip of the nose."

"So! Then it *might* have been a case of mistaken identity, even with your expertness and your long previous acquaintance with this lady?"

"Yes, sir. And now I remember noticing a peculiarity in the woman's walk which Mrs. Borden does not possess. I remarked upon it at the time to the gatekeeper."

"He also recognized her?"

"Yes, as positively as I did. But then he could have seen no more of her face than I—the chin and lips, you know."

And Old Falcon related, to the minutest detail, the incident, as he and Dalton, the gatekeeper had witnessed it, with the single exception of his having picked up something from the muddy walk outside the gate, which the woman might have dropped, and which action, it will be remembered, had not been perceived by his companion.

With this one reservation, his account was photographic in its graphic fidelity.

Inspector Byrnes reflected a moment, with his glance abstractedly resting upon Susie Borden's sweet bowed face, and then shifted it interrogatively to his friend, the police justice, who had been sitting passively at his elbow during the examination, and now gave a slight nod in response.

"Will you personally be responsible for the—lady's" (he wouldn't say "prisoner's") "appearance here, or in a court of examination when wanted, major?" the inspector then abruptly asked, while jotting down a memorandum.

"I will, sir!" was Old Falcon's relieved and hearty reply.

"She is at liberty!"

Susie began to cry a little now, she was so comforted, and yet still so mystified and unhappy, but quickly became more composed as Fanny and Mr. Parsons both bent over her with whispered encouragement.

As the trio were passing out, under Detective Latham's escort, the inspector signed Falconbridge to tarry, which he did.

"In the event of this affair continuing something of a mystery, major," observed the inspector, quite genially, now that they were virtually alone, "you will doubtless be retained in it by the Cosmopolitan Express people, eh?"

The Falcon Detective smiled urbanely. If the inspector was something of a diplomatist, so was he.

"I think it very likely, inspector," was the placid reply. "As you are perhaps aware, I have done work for the company heretofore, with satisfaction to them, I am inclined to think."

"Ah! You incline then, my dear major, to the belief that Mrs. Borden is entirely innocent of this charge, notwithstanding the strong circumstantial case that might be worked up against her?"

"Emphatically, yes, my dear inspector."

"So do I." Then, abruptly: "What do you think of the sister?"

The major smiled again, with additional ur-

banity, you might say, if not literally "with a smile that was childlike and bland," in the case of Brett Hart's Chinaman with the veteran William Nye.

"Emphatically—nothing!" he replied, with a lazy and consumedly suggestive drawl.

Both the inspector and his friend, the justice, burst into a laugh.

"Good-night, major," cried the former. "Even if you're too old to be caught with chaff, don't ever make love to that handsome sister of Mrs. Borden's *too* pronouncedly."

"I wonder," thought Falconbridge, on his way to rejoin his party, "if Byrnes really did think me capable of giving away a prospective case for the benefit of whatever nickel-badged galoot he may chance to put on it in his own interest? However, Miss Fanny will bear studying, and I must watch her manner of walking yet more closely."

The ladies were permitted to return to their home under Parsons's escort, after the Elevated Railroad station had been reached.

"You won't think of quitting the city now, as a matter of course?" Falconbridge asked of Susie, at the last.

"Certainly not," she replied. "Do you imagine," with a faint smile, "I can forget that you are responsible for me? Oh, how generous it was of you, sir!"

"Nonsense! Expect to see me early in the morning." And, with a parting pressure of her poor little hand—it was still trembling, he noticed—he hurried away, the police detective having already set off for his post at the Grand Central.

Falconbridge's next visit was at the headquarters of the Cosmopolitan Express Co., where, as he had surmised and hoped, his private detective services were instantly engaged in the case.

"Borden's assailant and the stolen money-package! these are what we look to you to discover. Byrnes is, doubtless, a shrewd enough official in his public way, but we don't take much stock in his staff, and you can give an exclusive attention to the matter, which he can't. Go in, *carte blanche*!"

Such was the substance of Old Falcon's instructions from those who had reason to have every confidence in his ability and judgment.

An hour later, say ten o'clock, and muffled to the eyes, for the night was sufficiently cool to warrant it, he was watching the front of the Borden cottage, from an inconspicuous post of observation opposite, with one hand, which was in his overcoat pocket, softly trifling with the small object which he had picked up from the walk outside the train-yard gate.

CHAPTER IV.

SUSIE, OR SUSIE'S DOUBLE—WHICH?

HE had already inspected this small object at his leisure, with little satisfaction to himself as yet, and now he mechanically took it out of his pocket, and toyed with it in the dim light.

It was a gold garter-clasp of peculiar and ornate design, such as had latterly become something of a 'fad' among American fashionable women and others—an imported fancy from Paris or London, as a matter of course. The design was of two hearts, linked by a central star, all of solid gold prettily chased, but without the trace of initials or monogram, the lower edges of the figures being embellished by a short gold fringe falling from their undersides, and the entire trinket occupying about the space of two silver quarter-dollars linked at their edges.

This was the article that had probably been lost from the apparel of the woman of the train-yard gate, the presumable assailant and robber!

It was a clew, but certainly a most tantalizing one. How should or could it be followed up? The detective, of course, determined to do so, sooner or later, but his preliminary embarrassment can be understood.

"The deuce!" he growled to himself. "How shall I ever manage to discover whichever of those handsome sisters may have an odd garter-clasp, the mate to this incriminating one, without hopelessly offending against the canons of propriety? Hal himself might eventually be led into helping me, but then there! Who can tell whether he himself believes in his wife's innocence or guilt? Men are very Luciferians for suspicions and contradictory feelings at times!"

He thrust the trinket once more out of sight, as he would gladly have done out of mind, too, had it been in his power, and again cast his gaze reflectively on the house-front opposite.

There were lights up-stairs, but none below, showing that, in all probability, young Mrs. Borden (who would, the detective thought, have been most likely to occupy the best front bedroom) was still restless and wakeful with her unhappiness.

"It just couldn't have been Susie, that's certain!" thought Falconbridge. "And, as to that sister of hers, they are certainly of about the same height and figure. But, even if Fanny had succeeded in counterfeiting Susie so cleverly as to deceive both Dalton and myself, could she have deceived Hal, notwithstanding that they did not seem to exchange a dozen words before."

separating at that mysteriously magic moment, as it now appears? Hardly; and yet, if Susie's voice, no less than her dress and manner, had been imitated with equal cleverness! Ha!"

He abruptly interrupted himself, for at this juncture the window lights he had been watching were suddenly extinguished.

A moment later the street door noiselessly opened and closed, and—then the detective was just in time to check an audible gasp of supreme astonishment.

Gliding gracefully out under a street lamp, that was posted nearly opposite the garden-gate, there appeared—Susie Borden or, her double—the identical woman, he could have sworn, of the train-yard mystery!

She stood guardedly for a moment; then, with a feminine down look after the hang of her dress-skirt and cloak, passed rapidly and silently toward the west.

That the detective was instantly in noiseless secret pursuit we may be sure.

The woman wore a half-vail, as in the first instance, and he had thus only again caught a view of the lower part of her face; but he was absolutely certain that he could be making no mistake.

He even now remarked the slight peculiarity in her walk—not an ungraceful peculiarity, by the way—which had attracted his criticism in the first instance.

Still, this might well enough be assumed for the occasion, though it would argue unusual cleverness and far-sight in the masquerader.

"Tracked! tracked!" muttered the detective to himself, with a mental rubbing of his hands. "That is either Susie Borden or her sister Fanny Elmore, and the question ought now to be set at rest once for all."

And, with the secret zest of a blood-hound on the scent, he kept up the pursuit.

The Borden cottage was on one of the newer and better Yorkville up-town cross-streets west of Third avenue, and the woman was heading directly west toward the Fifth avenue or eastern Central Park boundary.

She was pursuing her course along the north sidewalk, comparatively well lighted by the moon, while her pursuer, by keeping on the south side, in the deep shadow cast by the tall new residences, without reference to the street-lamps, and a little in the rear, was enabled to keep her in plain view with but little difficulty, and with such "shadowing" expertness as to remain wholly unperceived.

Arriving at Fifth avenue, she crossed to the broad, umbrageous walk skirting the Park wall, and seemed to be waiting impatiently, as if by appointment.

The detective managed to cross the causeway lower down, unperceived, and was cautiously flitting, little by little, nearer and nearer, when the woman was suddenly joined by a man, who somehow gave the impression of having also been secretly dogging her steps—probably far enough behind the detective to have rendered him ignorant of a similar object on the latter's part.

At all events, it was quite evident that this was not the person the woman had been expecting to meet.

As the fellow was seen but not heard by the detective (now creeping up against the wall, but not yet within earshot) to address her, she repulsed him with an indignant movement, as in the case of a stranger presuming upon his insolence.

Then the detective caught these words, in a louder and more threatening voice, on the part of the man:

"This is what I want then—an even divvy of that fat package! Otherwise look out!"

The woman's response was in a no less startling and unexpected form for the menacer than for the secret witness.

With the rapidity of thought she produced something that glittered in the shadow from her bosom, struck desperately out with it, and then ran up the avenue at the top of her speed, leaving the man prostrate on the ground, whither he had fallen, with a writhing movement and a low cry, after clapping his hands convulsively to his breast.

The detective bounded forward, without a word, and, while bending over the fallen man, after a swift glance that told of a severe stabbing, kept his gaze sweeping the moonlighted open street to the north, so as to be sure that the fugitive would not cross it to regain the east side without his knowledge.

"You are sorely hurt?" he queried of the man.

"To the death, I fear," was the groaned reply. "Oh, curses!"

"Who was that woman who stabbed you?" demanded Falconbridge.

"I sha'n't tell you!" The words were resolute, but so faintly spoken as to be scarcely audible.

It was evident that the man was in a critical condition.

"I shall bring you help at the earliest moment. Try to take courage."

With these words Falconbridge hastily arose.

His eyes had scarcely for an instant quitted the long broad stretch of roadway, without per-

ceiving the fugitive cross it; but now, he saw a policeman strolling down the opposite sidewalk from the next corner above.

He ran over to him, showed his private badge, and otherwise made himself known to him.

No need to question as to the fleeing woman, who had doubtless by this time hurried off through one of the Park entrances toward the west.

"A man is lying over there, severely stabbed," he said, hurriedly. "I saw the assault, and shall tell of it at the precinct station-house. Go to him at once, and I will ring up an ambulance without delay."

As the officer started off promptly in the direction indicated, the detective turned into the street on which the Borden cottage was situated, and ran hard, with the latter as his objective point.

He fortunately chanced to meet another patrolman, and one with whom he was personally acquainted, on the Park avenue crossing.

To him he delegated the duty of calling up an ambulance, and then, after a dozen words of explanation, continued his run.

As near as he could judge, with due allowance for these detentions, he was once more in front of the cottage, within ten minutes of his witnessing the mysterious assault; and, in view of the lookout subsequently instituted, it seemed simply incredible that the woman assailant could have returned to the house before him.

That one of the two sisters who should now prove to be absent, would assuredly be the double criminal-assailant, was a settled thing in his mind.

He accordingly rung the bell without an instant's delay.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

THERE was but a moment's pause in the response. Then a light appeared in one of the second-story windows, after which Susie Borden thrust out her head, very cautiously, and inquired, with much timidity, who was there and what was wanted.

"Thank God, that it was not *she*!" was the detective's first inward reflection.

Then he made himself known, saying:

"A very extraordinary incident, Mrs. Borden, with regard to which I must see you without delay! Otherwise, I shouldn't think of disturbing you at this hour of the night."

"Oh, it is not late, major—not yet eleven," was the reply. "I shall let you in directly."

Her 'directly' was but a few seconds, rather than minutes; for women can dress themselves in some sort much quicker than men, when put to it.

"Your sister—Miss Fanny?" was the detective's first exclamation, as he followed Susie into the just-lighted little parlor.

"She will be down in a minute."

"He stared at her."

"Are you—quite sure?" he stammered.

"Sure!" in much surprise. "Of course I am, Mr. Falconbridge! We sleep together—nearly always, with poor Hal so much away from home."

Here Miss Fanny made her appearance, looking undeniably sleepy, and perhaps a little cross at being so summarily disturbed, for the handsome spinster had more of a temper than her younger sister.

"Answer me this question first, I beg of you, ladies," said the detective, at last. "Has neither of you been out of the house since your return from the inspector's office?"

A wondering negative was the response, together with some mention of particulars as to the circumstances of closing up the house, retiring for the night, and the like.

Old Falcon could not abstain from a despairing gesture.

"Then, who could have been the woman," he cried—"your outer counterpart to a dot, Mrs. Borden, as in the incident of this afternoon—whom I followed from this house, less than half an hour ago, and who stabbed a strange man, almost under my very nose, at the Central Park boundary wall, ten minutes later?"

Their staring looks of appalled astonishment were his only answer.

Without attempting to blink the fact of his having had the cottage under secret espionage, he at once related everything that had occurred.

Hardly had he finished when heavier steps than those of a woman were heard upon the stairs; then Mr. Frank Parsons, the lodger, hastily dressed, likewise made his appearance, to inquire into the nature of the untimely visit of inquiry, which, it seemed, had disturbed the first installment of his customary night's rest.

A moment or two later the detective's story had been repeated to him, to his staring mystification. Janet Douglas, who had been similarly aroused, came down stairs, mouth o'en and eyes like small saucers, to imbibe the news, piecemeal.

"It be the fairies at their work!" gasped the Scotch girl. "The cottage maun be unco uncanny!" And, with her gown on awry and her shock of reddish hair tousled, she plumped her-

self into a chair without being asked, and gazed fearlessly into vacancy.

So, here were the entire four inmates of the cottage gathered together in the astounded detective's presence, with the incidents of the night and afternoon a more exasperating mystery than ever!

"This is certainly a most extraordinary state of affairs!" commented Parsons. "It is worse than the Cock Lane ghost, by a long shot. Only," with a nervous little laugh, "there can be no doubt as to the substantialness of Mr. Falconbridge's experience. The subsequent tragedy precludes any such notion."

Susie and her sister were unaffectedly frightened, and said but little.

The detective had before this carefully studied the fresh-featured lodger, and he did so again, but only to conclude, as before, that there was nothing to be thought to the young man's disadvantage, his neutral-tinted eyes to the contrary notwithstanding.

After some desultory talk, whose unsatisfactoriness can be imagined, he rose to go, with a sort of an apology, at having felt it incumbent upon himself to watch the house.

"Don't mention it!" cried Susie, eagerly. "I only hope you will continue to keep on watching till daylight."

"So do I," said Miss Elmore, with no less enthusiasm, which was rather out of her reserved, self-contained line. "I can't help feeling creepish, as it is."

The maid of all work threw her apron over her head, and groaned, while pattering her feet on the carpet.

Mr. Parsons, who was obviously of a humorous turn on occasion, whispered something seductively in her ear, and then burst out laughing at the shivering jump she made in consequence. But, as his object was evidently to put the sisters in a less lugubrious frame of mind, Falconbridge thought even better of him for his seeming considerateness.

"But, joking apart," suggested Mr. Parsons, to the detective, "don't you think we had better search the house, if only as a matter of form?" And he glanced commiseratingly at the women's pale faces.

As a matter of form, yes, Falconbridge did think so, though perfectly certain that the mysterious fugitive could not have forestalled him by retracing her steps; and the search was accordingly made with much thoroughness, and without a particle of success.

"Since you don't seem to mind it," observed the detective at last, "I shall resume my watch of the premises till daybreak."

Both sisters brightened up perceptibly at this announcement, though Miss Fanny, with a glance of her undeniably beautiful eyes, could not help pitying him aloud for his prospective loss of sleep, and all on their account.

Mr. Parsons had followed the detective out to the gate.

"Sir," said the young man, earnestly, "I wish you would henceforth consider me at your service in this affair, if you should come to think that I can be of some use to you. I have a good deal of time on my hands, and," smiling, "though I may not exactly look it, I have a natural inclination for danger and adventure, with, I think, both physique and pluck to back the craving."

"I shall think it over," was the detective's hearty reply, for he was beginning to like Parsons. "Then, the first thing in the morning, I shall visit that wounded chap in the hospital, in the hope of getting something out of him."

"You do not imagine his wound might have been fatal, then?" asked the other, with intensified interest.

"I have an idea that it will not prove so."

"Where was the wound?"

"In the breast, I should say, though he kept his hands so tightly over it that there was but little blood. But, from what I have told you, you can understand that there was no time for more than a mere glance at him on my part. Good-night!"

"One minute! I'll share your watch, if you like."

"What! and leave the women in the house alone?"

"True; I didn't think of that."

"Good-night!"

The remainder of the detective's watch-duty was without any incident whatever, though a crowning adventure-mystery was in store for him.

At the first streaks of daybreak he was hurrying away in the direction of the nearest police station, to discover what hospital the wounded man had been conveyed to, when, directly after turning into Third avenue, the streets being still dark and deserted, he was suddenly confronted by—the object of his search, the mysterious double of Susie Borden!

Instantly recovering from his surprise, he was about precipitating himself upon her when, with a low, musical laugh, she threw up her hand with a light playful gesture.

A smarting sensation came into his eyes, and, as he still tried to seize the woman, a heavy fist-blow in the throat sent him staggering back.

There was not a sound of her retreating steps, yet, when he recovered himself, almost instantly, he was as indubitably alone in the gaunt, naked dark thoroughfare, with the silent storefronts on the one hand and the hideous iron skeleton of the Elevated Railway structure on the other, as if the earth had opened and swallowed the woman out of sight.

CHAPTER VI. HOSPITAL SECRETS.

"RED-PEPPERED and eunched into the bargain, by Jove!" gasped the Falcon Detective, with an incensed and humiliated feeling that was novel enough with him.

However, he did not retrace his steps. Where would have been the use? Wasn't that tantalizing, infernal *ignis fatuus* of a woman as likely to be in one place as another? And should he give himself away again as having been once more the shuttlecock of her sport? Not if he knew it!

So, after a wondering stare or two, he went for breakfast at a little all-night restaurant-dive, not far up the avenue.

After that, when it was nearly sun-up, with the great city thoroughly astir, he proceeded to the police station, to learn of the sergeant that the wounded man had been conveyed to the Presbyterian Hospital, where, at last accounts, it was thought that he would recover.

Falconbridge contented himself with giving the sergeant, for entrance on his blotter, only a very prosaic account of his knowledge of the affair; and then lost no more time in reaching the hospital specified.

Yorkville, the middle east-side of the brick-and-mortar wilderness of Manhattan Island, is the chosen quarter of hospitals, asylums, 'homes,' and similar praiseworthy institutions. They are nobly built, of agreeable architecture, with finely laid-out grounds, and of superb appointments generally; and the long ridge of ground, along which their sites are mostly chosen, between Third avenue and the Central Park boundary line, is finely adapted for the purpose, being high, rocky and susceptible of easy drainage. Fine residences intersperse these palatial charities, which are no less an ornament than a blessing to the teeming and giant metropolis of which they are such conspicuous adjuncts; and, second only, perhaps, in point of capacity alone, the Presbyterian Hospital is especially deserving of grateful recognition.

The Falcon Detective presently stood beside the cot on which was extended the form of the man stabbed by the mysterious woman on the preceding night.

The physician in attendance had previously informed the detective that the wound had been "a fortunate one," in medical parlance, and that there was a fair chance of recovery.

The ward-nurse in charge stepped back as Falconbridge approached, it being understood that private speech of an official character was desired with the injured man.

The latter who was broad awake and seemingly not in great present suffering, looked up, with a sarcastic smile on his pale mustache-shaded lips.

"Eh, you again?" he half-sneered.

"Hallo!" responded the detective, now for the first time recognizing the fellow.

A sturdily-built but sinister-visaged young man, whom he had known for some time about the Grand Central as a brakeman on the New York and New Haven Road; and now, *mirabile dictu!* recollecting to have been on the very train of which Hal Borden's Express car had been a part on the preceding eventful afternoon!

"I say, major," and the man looked up with a cunning air, "you are doubtless surprised, eh?"

The man's name was Jake Gunter.

"I should say I was, Jake?" replied the detective, genially seating himself at the fellow's side.

"You see, I didn't go on to Boston with the train," volunteered the other, "but was left off, with one other train-hand that could be spared, to temporarily look after poor Hal Borden. That accounts, you know, for my being back in time for last evening's little adventure. Ah!"

And he blinked his secretive little eyes as he smiled again.

"Of course this explains the thing," observed the detective, pretending not to heed the man's decidedly discouraging manner. "Jove! but how suddenly that girl knifed you!"

"It was pretty sudlitt!" with a shoulder-shrugging attempt that caused him a twinge. "Ouch!—but I'll get even some day, major. Don't doubt that. Jake Gunter always gets even."

"I should hope so, in this instance at least."

"You don't seem to be very curious, though," a little disappointedly. "Or are you only kidding me?"

"Kidding you! Curious! Of course, being a criminal-taker by profession, Jake, I'd naturally relish capturing the cat in petticoats on general principles. But, apart from that, why should I be especially inquisitive if a likely young chap's sweetheart digs him with a sticker in one of her tantrums? Come, you dog! you had been running after some other girl, I'll be

bound, and the monster in the rumpus was green-eyed or nothing."

Jake Gunter closed his eyes thoughtfully, and then opened them with a snap.

"I won't be kidded—not by the sharpest detective this side the Devil's Kitchen!" he said, suddenly.

"But who the deuce is trying to kid you, as you so elegantly express it?"

"You are! You also had tracked that woman from the Borden cottage."

"I?" in admirably feigned surprise.

"Yes; you must have done so, or you wouldn't have been on hand so infernally prompt."

The detective laughed.

"Bless your eyes, Jake, do you imagine that I have nothing to do but be tracking strange young women?"

"Yes; when you're retained by the Cosmopolitan (as you doubtless are) and when the strange young woman chances to be the same that knifed Borden in the back, and got away with the ten thousand dollar swag."

"My young friend," still in bland surprise, "you really seem to know more about me and my affairs than I do myself."

"Oh, bosh! You've done their sharp work before, why not now?"

"You had better go and ask them—when you are able."

"Assert, if you can and dare, that you didn't overhear what passed between me and that—that she-devil before she poked me!"

"I overheard your concluding words, but no more."

CHAPTER VII. FRESH SURPRISES.

"WHAT were my concluding words, then?" demanded the wounded brakeman.

"They were these, or to this effect: 'This is what I want—an even divvy. Otherwise, look out!'"

"Humph! On your word of honor, Mr. Falconbridge, was that all you overheard?"

"Substantially, yes; on my word."

Jake Gunter seemed considerably relieved by this assurance.

When he turned up his beady little eyes to the detective again the shrewd, knowing sparkle was in them once more.

"Wouldn't you just like to know who that woman was and is?" he sneered.

"Candidly, my friend, yes."

"Can you keep a secret?" slowly.

"Yes."

"Bend down a little closer, major."

The detective did so.

"So can I!" was the chuckling announcement, after which the fellow burst into as much of a laugh as he had unimpaired breathing apparatus left for, and regarded his visitor with insolent triumph.

Old Falcon returned his regard with quiet contemplativeness for a moment. Plainly, there was nothing to be extracted from Mr. Jake Gunter, at least for the present, even if he were himself wholly acquainted with the mysterious woman's identity, which might be seriously doubted.

He was of that large order of low, partly ignorant men, who mistake cheap cunning for cleverness, and secretiveness for self-importance. There are so many such! They compose the bigoted rank and file of secret societies in the abstract. To know something—even a bald password or some initiative formula—apart from the apprehension of the uninducted, is the owlish delight of what they doubtless deem their intellectual existence. Secretiveness is their cult. And they profoundly hug themselves with the proud consciousness that they can be exclusive in this respect, if in nothing else.

Suddenly the bland look in the detective's face was replaced by a stern, uncompromising expression.

He once more leaned forward over the jeering face.

"Young man," he said, "it is against my principles to threaten a man who is down in his luck, as you happen to be at present. But, mark me well! when I next question you on the subject, you will be a little more civil and communicative, or—" He paused, with a peculiar smile, which was evidently not without its effect.

Jake Gunter made a swallowing effort, and his lips had suddenly grown very dry.

"Or what?" he asked.

The detective smiled.

"Oh, nothing much," indifferently. "Only in that last engineer's strike in Chicago, Train Dispatcher Hewitt—ever hear of him?—was murdered, and somebody saw who threw the brick that treacherously crushed in the back of the poor devil's skull!"

From being pale already, Jake Gunter's face grew as white as snow, and he buried his eyes in his pillow without another word; while Falconbridge, with a cheery good-by nod, leisurely took his departure.

After a brief visit to the Grand Central, it was still quite early in the morning when the detective once more made his appearance at the Borden cottage.

"Oh, major, I am so glad you are come!" was Susie's greeting. "Inspector Byrnes has

just send word that I must appear this morning at eleven before Justice Jinks for a regular court examination."

"Good! I was expecting it," was the cheerful reply. "We had better be going at once."

They were soon on their way to court, Miss Fanny and Mr. Frank Parsons being again of the party.

"Do you know the justice?" Mrs. Borden asked, with no little anxiety. "He is a nice man, I hope?"

"You saw him last night with the inspector."

"Oh, was that he?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"I am so glad! He looked really amiable and intellectual."

"He is just that—out of court," the last words being pronounced *sotto voce*.

Justice Jinks was, indeed, on most official occasions, a very pompous and disagreeable little man, with a strut like a peacock's, a strident, self-celebrating voice, suggestive of a cross-cut saw under the action of a boss file, and a generally ridiculous grandiloquence of manner for the special admiration of the loafers, idlers, washer-women and pot-house politicians who were mostly the chief spectators of his Dogberry decisions and buncombe officiousness. But, Susie's examination was, fortunately, in private, and much less of an ordeal than she had imagined.

Inspector Byrnes was himself on hand, and he had taken a generously benevolent interest in her unhappiness, and in the mysteriously-criminal impersonation of which she had, in his opinion, so obviously been made the victim. Mike Dalton, the gatekeeper, was there, with testimony similar to that elicited from Falconbridge by the inspector, but with the same flaw in it, to the effect that neither had he seen the full face of Hal Borden's presumable assailant, and was therefore unable to swear to her absolute identity with the young wife. Then Falconbridge capped the climax in Susie's favor with a detailed account of the mysterious stabbing of Jake Gunter, and everything having the remotest bearing thereon (though as to his own encounter with the will-o'-the-wisp adventuress later on he was discreetly reticent, through a natural sense of humiliation at her having escaped him so cleverly.)

The upshot of the examination, therefore, was that she was formally discharged from custody by reason of there being insufficient evidence against her.

Nevertheless, there were a number of railroad and Express people present who were obviously dissatisfied with this disposition of the case; and it was with renewed unhappiness that the young wife noticed their stern faces and suspicious regards when quitting the examination room with her companions.

"How dare they?" she demanded, with tearful indignation, of Falconbridge, when they were once more in the open air. "Your story of what occurred last night should alone have vindicated me in all men's eyes!"

"So it should," Mr. Parsons quickly supported her by saying. "It is cruelly unjust and unmagnanimous!"

Miss Elmore, being less excitable, ventured upon no outspoken comment.

"My dear Mrs. Borden," replied the detective, "why should you care, since the law is satisfied? Now do you just go home, and make ready for nursing Hal back to strength and health—I understand he is expected by the two P. M. train—and don't trouble your mind any further as to these pig-headed men's continued suspicions."

"But how can I do that? Were not many of them my friends on Hal's account? And now to think that they should even dream me capable—Major!" abruptly and with a searching look.

"Yes, Susie."

"You must guess the real cause of these continual suspicions, if you have received no positive intimation of it."

"I?" with a deprecating cough.

"Yes; I am certain of it. And I insist on your telling me what it is."

"But my dear lady, the impenetrable obstinacy and stubbornness of some men—"

"That is very well; but I want to know the cause of it in this instance."

Falconbridge was then reluctantly compelled to admit that it had become understood among Harry Borden's recent associates and fellow-workers that the young man himself had conceived the notion, unalterable for the present at least, of his wife's guilt.

Then, shocked at the look of agony in her poor white face, he could only awkwardly press her hand and hurry away, after promising to call again at the cottage at about the time of her husband's expected return.

"The devil take such mysteries, and the complications of unhappiness and estrangement they are so likely to give rise to!" he muttered to himself, after a glance behind at the trimly-built but grief-bowed little woman, whom her companions were gently escorting toward the nearest Elevated Railroad station. "It is enough to make a fellow forswear this miserable detective business once and for all, and I often wonder at myself at not having done so!"

He was on his way to report progress at the

Express Office, when he was touched on the arm by his odd little assistant, Master Tommy Dodd, who had followed him from the vicinity of the examination room.

"Inspector Byrnes, my sovereign liege," said the lad, with the old-time, deep-voiced staginess that will be familiar to the readers of characteristic series which have preceded this story, "would like to exchange a few words with your Highness in his office without delay."

"All right, my lad," was the reply. "In the mean time do you be in waiting for me at the down-town offices of the Cosmopolitan Express Company. There's big business afoot, Tommy, in which your specialties may prove useful."

"My lord, to hear is to obey," and the queer little fellow vanished.

"Don't think I'm bent on a second attempt to pump you, major," said the inspector, smiling, when the detective reached his office.

"I should hope not," replied the latter. "But, candidly speaking, inspector, it would be dry enough pumping as yet; even if I were not averse to the process. I'm still all at sea in the case."

"Still," after a slight pause, "you are probably keeping your eye on that handsome elder sister?"

Half-seriously this time.

"Pshaw!"

"Well, perhaps you are right. I remarked to-day that there is no perceptible difference in their gracefulness of walk and carriage."

"Of course there isn't."

"Still, the peculiarity you noticed in the train-yard woman's walk—it might have been cleverly adopted for the occasion, eh?"

"Why not?"

"And you remarked the same peculiarity in the woman of your last night's adventure?"

"I haven't said so yet, but I do now."

"Good! The deuce of an adventure it was, too. And the railroader she poked—he's close-mouthed as an oyster, you say?"

"Yes."

"His tongue might be loosened," reflectively, "sooner or later."

"There's no objection to your putting on a thumb-screw or two, that I know of."

The inspector shot him a keen glance from those sleepy eyes of his, that could be so wide-awake and searching when he chose.

"Just as if you hadn't essayed one or two already!" he half-suggested, half-queried.

"I am satisfied there is nothing to be got out of Gunter—of his present own knowledge, at least; and for the best of reasons."

"Why?"

"Because I don't believe he knows anything to tell. He probably saw the deed, track'd the doer, and is as much mystified as we with regard to her identity, but bent on black-mailing for a divvy of the money-package."

"Oho!" and the inspector strove to dissemble that this was a new idea for him. "Well, odder things than that have happened." Then, in his swift, abrupt way: "What do you think of that young chap, Parsons, the lodger?"

Falconbridge smiled.

Then, with an exact repetition of his words and manner on the preceding night, he drawled out:

"Emphatically—nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" And the inspector likewise had his laugh again, though it was once more upon himself; and he called out after the major, as he was quitting the room: "Well, I can't caution you against making love to the lodger, too, in all conscience!"

"I rather think I'll stop being interviewed by his Worship, the inspector," half-angrily muttered Old Falcon to himself on his way to the Express Office. "If a mighty good fellow in his way, he isn't my superior, and I don't purpose furnishing suggestions for his men to work on."

After making his report to the Express authorities, and giving a commission to Tommy Dodd, the detective got his lunch, and reached the Borden cottage at the hour the wounded messenger should have arrived.

But it was only to find Susie in fresh unhappiness, and her sister less remonstratively indignant.

"What do you think, sir?" cried the former. "Hal has refused to be brought to his own home, and has been carried from the train to a hospital, at his own insistence!" And she strove to choke back her sobs, but in vain.

"What hospital?" asked the detective, after a pause.

"The Presbyterian," Miss Elmore replied for her sister.

"Here's a coincidence!" thought Old Falcon to himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAL BORDEN.

"Who brought you this news, ma'm?" asked the detective, when Susan had in some measure mastered her sobs.

"Mr. Parsons," she replied. "Fanny and I had gone to the Grand Central with him, with the expectation of bringing my husband home with us. Everything was in readiness. The

best room up-stairs was aired, with a nice wood-fire in the grate—for Hal has always been so fond of a wood-fire. And we even had the easiest, roomiest hackney-coach engaged. But while we were impatiently counting the minutes in the waiting-room, Mike Dalton sent in a messenger to say first—just what had happened. The—the train was a few minutes ahead of time, and—and Hal had already been carried out to an ambulance at the—the yard gate."

"Hush, dear!" urged Miss Fanny, putting her arm around Susie. "Try and not break down again."

"Where is Parsons?" asked Falconbridge.

"He went to the hospital direct, saying he would make Hal ashamed of himself," Fanny made reply. "Susie would have gone, too, but I wouldn't let her. I didn't think it right."

"That was well, but she shall go there with me now—both of you. I'll interview Borden first alone, and—well, we'll see what can be done."

"Oh, if—if he is once set against me," sobbed the unhappy wife, "it—it will take a—a whole avalanche to change him. I know it will. He—he was always just as stubborn as he was good to me. He—he was a sort of—of horse and mule by turns."

"Never mind; get ready and come along," continued the detective, hopefully. "We must trust in luck for getting on his horse side, I suppose; and if that fails, I reckon I can play avalanche on occasion."

They accordingly went to the hospital with all expedition.

Frank Parsons, who was just issuing from the office as they entered, shook his head gloomily.

"That man is just hide-bound!" he said, disgustedly. "Notwithstanding I've told him everything that has been developed, he won't listen to me. I don't know what to make of him. He's no more my chum, Hal Borden, of two days ago than to-day is yesterday."

The detective signed to him to remain with the ladies, and went direct to Borden's couch.

By yet another strange coincidence, the wounded messenger had been placed in the same ward with Jake Gunter, and was even in the couch next to the one occupied by the latter.

Borden was pale and already emaciated. But he seemed to be easy, and at first held out his hand cordially, as to an old friend.

Then, however, as his face clouded and took on a wearied look, it was plain that he guessed something of the detective's errand, and was bored accordingly.

"I am pretty comfortable now," he said, in answer to the opening inquiries, "though the trip from Stamford here tried me severely. However, the doctors and surgeons seem certain that I shall pull through, and I suppose I ought to be satisfied. Yes," gloomily and slowly, "I suppose I ought!"

"And why shouldn't you be satisfied with such encouragement, old fellow?" cheerily demanded his visitor, though anticipating and dreading the response.

Borden gave him a terrible look.

"To pull through—to live, and for what?" he exclaimed.

But Old Falcon had returned him his look with one as stern and reproachful as his own.

"For your wife's sake, if not for life's sake—for the sake of the true woman who adores you!" he replied. "Don't turn away your head, Hal Borden—don't you dare try on any of your infernal nonsense with me!"

The sufferer's pale face had flushed angrily.

"It was she that—that brought me to this!" he muttered.

"Shame upon you! Can you have heard of my last night's adventure with this woman, your robber and assailant—when your unhappy, sorrow-bowed Susie was at home in her bed; can you have heard of this, I say, and still retain these un-worthy suspicions of the woman of your heart? Answer me this instantly!"

But Hal could not, he seemed so astounded.

"What adventure are you talking about?" he at last feebly demanded.

It was now his visitor's turn to be astonished.

"What!" he exclaimed; "has not your chum and lodger, Frank Parsons, already told you of this?"

"No; but wait!" Hal passed his hand tremblingly over his forehead, on which a damp sweat had gathered. "Frank did mumble something hurriedly toward the last, but perhaps I was too much incensed at his intercessions to listen very closely."

The detective was silent for a moment. What did this mean? And, if Parsons had really told the sufferer of the last night's adventure, as he had just claimed to have done, why had he "mumbled" the narration?

"The sincerity of that young man will bear investigation, I hope," said Falconbridge to himself. "Hallo! Could he be secretly in love with Susie Borden, and thus be interested in fomenting this estrangement? But we shall see."

"Listen, Hal Borden!" he said, aloud and with much impressiveness.

And then, in low tones, he poured into the wounded man's ear the entire history of the

case in New York, as it had come under his experience.

Borden seemed to follow him at times with some difficulty, but on the whole showed that he had been more or less profoundly impressed.

"This is wonderful—very remarkable!" he murmured at last. "It certainly shakes me somewhat in my heretofore horrible belief."

"Shakes you!" echoed Falconbridge, indignantly. "Man alive! don't you see that it lets your poor wife altogether out of the accursed mystery once for all, and *in toto*?"

The invalid drew a long breath, and his brows contracted.

"Still, there remains," he muttered, cloudily, "there remains the first fact—what I saw!"

"You mean what you imagine you saw."

"Oh, the deuce! Why, major, it was her voice, too, no less than her person!"

"A voice may be counterfeited."

"By whom, unless by an intimate female friend? And she has none such—save only Fanny," his face flushed again, and in an odd way, that was not lost upon his visitor, "who assuredly could not have committed such an infernal deed."

"Indeed! You are highly complimentary to your wife, I must say! And why might not Fanny have been capable of it, at least equally with Susie?"

Borden looked up with a startled expression.

"Good heavens!" he gasped; "you don't imagine Fanny might have personated her, do you?"

The detective laughed somewhat exasperately.

"Of course, I don't!" he replied. "But your mind must be, indeed, weak or wandering. Otherwise you would know that my last night's experience disposes of such a supposition just as indubitably as it lets Susie out of the affair. Both sisters were asleep in the same bed when I was pursuing your mysterious assailant (who certainly looked the counterpart of either one of them, for that matter, barring the half-face, which I could not see). But why go over all this again. Should you be harder to convince, or duller of apprehension, with your own wife's and (incidentally) her sister's honor at stake, than Inspector Byrnes and Judge Jinks have been?"

"Oh, bother! Too many wheels within wheels for me."

"Tell me this, you blamed Mexican mule! Did you see the face of the woman who banded you the grip-sack?"

"Only the lower part of it, I must confess."

"Could you then swear absolutely that she was your wife?"

"Oh, perhaps not absolutely. But—good Lord! wouldn't I know my own wife, without seeing her entire face?"

"Certainly not, under the developments I have set forth—not any more than Mike Dalton or I myself would. And don't forget that we could almost have sworn to her identity at the time; whereas Dalton is now just as much convinced of his error as I am."

"But my other friends are not."

"Because you are not! For shame, Borden! Don't you perceive that they merely take their cue from your own pig-headed ungenerousness in the matter?"

"Perhaps so, but—Look here, major!" with growing irritation.

"Well?"

"Don't call call me a jackass or pig-headed any more!" with an oath. "It's cowardly of you, in my present position! Curse you!" with impotent fury; "if I were only at my best, I would punch your infernal old head for you!"

Falconbridge looked at him in momentary despair.

CHAPTER IX.

A COLD KISS.

IT was pretty evident that Hal Borden was not himself, mentally or physically, as was perhaps perfectly natural under the circumstances; but the detective remembered the young wife's unhappy face, and would not give over.

"Look here, Hal," he said at last, reaching out and taking the poor fellow's hand in his warm grasp.

Hal looked up with a short laugh.

"Ah!" continued the detective, cheerily; "that laugh, I see, forgives me, and the old kindly light is back in your eyes again."

"To be sure, old fellow."

"Turn your eyes to the right, and notice that chap in the next cot."

Borden did so, in some surprise.

"You can't see his face just now," continued the detective. "He's turned it away, though he has been watching us both curiously enough up to a few minutes ago, doubtlessly wishing he could overhear us. And he was, most likely, asleep when you were first brought into the ward, or he would have called out to you. Can you guess who he is?"

"Of course, I can't. Do I know him?"

"Yes. He is one of the actors in my last night's adventure—the man whom I saw stabbed

by the same mysterious woman (your wife's counterfeit-impersonator) who stabbed and robbed you!"

"Bless me, you don't say so!" and Borden's interest sensibly increased. "What a strange coincidence that we should now be all but cheek by-jowl in the same hospital!"

"Isn't it?"

"But you say I know him! who is he?"

"Jake Gunter."

"Brakeman Jake Gunter?"

"The same."

"Why, he was on my train! He even remained, with Jim Mosher, the newsman, at the hotel nursing me at the outset!"

"Just so."

"And he—he was stabbed by that woman, as you have related?"

"Yes. Listen!"

Slowly and impressively, the detective went over again with his adventure, as it related to Gunter; and then, with equal emphasis, he told of his subsequent interview with the injured brakeman, not so many hours previous.

Borden listened with absorbing interest, notwithstanding that he was betraying general fatigue.

"Now do you understand the entire complication thoroughly?" demanded Falconbridge at last.

"Yes; perfectly," was the reply.

"A wonderful jumble, eh?"

"Yes; though not so mixed up, after all."

"What do you make of it?"

"Simply this: That Jake knows the secret of the woman's identity, if he would only tell it."

"Humph! And why, do you imagine, he refuses to do so?"

"The deuce! any one knowing the fellow well could guess that. He wants half of that money-package, and would sooner snap this knife-thrust in silence than give up the hope of levying black-mail more successfully hereafter."

The detective smiled complacently.

Hal's mind was evidently clearing again, and he was, moreover, being led up nicely to the desired point.

"Right in one respect, my dear Hal, but wrong in another!" he commented.

"How is that?"

"You are right as to the rascal's intentions, but wrong as to his knowledge. I don't believe he knows any more about the woman's real identity than you or I do."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes. Here's that galoot's situation, in my judgment: He saw your attempted assassination, and doubtless jumped to the conclusion (just as you have so unmagnanimously done) that the perpetrator was your wife. He came back from Stamford early last evening hugging this impression to his mercenary heart. At the first opportunity he sets himself to watching the cottage, just as I was doing. This much he inadvertently admitted to me this morning; and it was possible for us both to be on the watch at the same time without being aware of each other's presence or intentions. Well, out comes the mysterious woman; and unbeknown to each other, we both begin to sleuth her, though with different objects—I to identify her in the interests of justice, he for the sole purpose of black-mail. You know the unsatisfactory results on both our parts."

Borden's brows were again contracted, as though the complications were once more growing too much for his weakened brain.

"Wait a minute," he said slowly. "How the deuce could that woman have come out of my house, when you proved so directly after her flight in the opposite direction that all of its four inmates were freshly roused from bed, and therefore could have had no knowledge of her whatever?"

Falconbridge shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask me something easy, my boy," he replied. "There is the rub, as Hamlet remarks. It is the heart of the mystery, which I am to exert my detective skill to discover. But this has nothing to do with Gunter. Recur to him now."

"Well, I am doing so," with an effort. "Yes, he evidently took the woman for Susie."

"Mistook, you should say. Well, now, my boy, I am going to prove to him, and to you through him, that it could not possibly have been Susie!"

"Ha! but how?"

"You shall see when I bring her and her sister up here to see you, as I am going to do instantly, after notifying Jake yonder of my intention. Both women shall be half-veiled, as in the case of the mysterious counterfeit. But mark the effect upon Gunter!"

"Oh!" and much to the detective's satisfaction, Borden was intensely interested in the proposed experiment. "But what do you predict it will be?"

"Astonishment at first—for he will think that he sees not one but two prospective victims of his black-mailing intention—his quarry duplicated before his very eyes; then increased astonishment, bewilderment—for both vails shall be raised at once, and he will know that the owner of neither sweet, pure face could have

been the infamously murderous trickster in all this affair!"

"Good!" Borden was very excited now. "It would be a test, you know!"

"A few moments' patience," and the detective went over to the neighboring cot.

Its occupant looked up inquiringly, but without a moment's pause or preparation, Falconbridge was at his ear.

"Listen!" he whispered, sternly. "I know your game. You imagine that you recognized Hal Borden's assailant as his wife. It was in this impression that you tracked the woman of last night, with the intention of forcing a divvy of the stolen Express package, and got the knife in your own ribs for your pains. Don't interrupt me, sir! I see in your face, cunning as it is, that my deduction has hit the nail on the head, which is sufficient for me. I am going to bring up both Mrs. Borden and her older sister. Both are probably known to you by sight?"

The fellow reluctantly nodded an affirmative.

"Both will be dressed and half-veiled as Mrs. Borden's infamous personator has been when seen. You will silently study their walk and carriage, no less than their persons. Then, when their vails are lifted, you will silently judge for yourself whether or not you have been and are still laboring under a false impression. You understand?"

Another nod, together with an interested look, hardly less intense than that manifested by Borden.

The detective proceeded to the office, and, after a few preparatory words to the sisters, returned to the ward with them, Parsons bringing up the rear, with a curiously eager look on his face.

The sisters, being similarly sized and prettily formed, were accustomed to dress much alike, as now, and both wore half-vails.

Susie somewhat interrupted the pre-arrangement by at once rushing up to her husband's couch, and kissing him, though without raising her vail.

It was something that he responded in kind, though it was a very cold kiss—not the sort, at all events, that she had a right to anticipate.

But then the suspense over, the projected test was still in his face, and his eyes were glued searchingly upon the occupant of the neighboring couch.

The latter, who had partly raised his head, was gazing with a sort of stupefied wonder, not unmixed with resentment, at the two women.

Then the sisters, standing in the space between the foot of the couches, as arranged by Falconbridge, at a signal from him, raised their vails simultaneously.

CHAPTER X.

CONFUSION.

A LOOK, first of doubt, then of blank disappointment, was observed to overspread Jake Gunter's countenance: and then, after shooting a peculiar glance at Parsons—notwithstanding that the latter was wholly in the background, and therefore the least conspicuous of the group—he sunk back upon his pillow with something like a muttered curse.

Borden gave a fevered exclamation, and stretched out his arms.

"By Jupiter!" he cried; "but it does seem convincing."

Then, as Susie sprung to him once more, she had less cause to complain of the kiss that responded to hers (though it was still not altogether what it should be), and one of his hands also groped out for Fanny's, as she also bent smilingly over him at the other side of his couch.

Falconbridge was turning to Parsons (who was approaching Borden, to have his share in the congratulations) with a gratified air at what he considered the complete success of his experiment, when a low, hoarse call from the brakeman attracted his attention.

Gunter was still staring at Parsons, the vulgar secretiveness once more repulsively prominent in his face, though mixed with a wild eagerness.

"That man!" he hoarsely whispered, as the detective stepped over to him. "That chap with the women yonder!" and he grasped Falconbridge's arm hard with one hand, while pointing to the unconscious Parsons with the other; "who and what is he? Speak!"

The detective could not but be impressed, if not puzzled, by the man's manner.

"That is the Bordens' lodger, Mr. Frank Parsons," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Their lodger—their lodger?"

"Yes," impatiently. "What of it?"

Gunter let him go, with suddenly-assumed indifference.

"Nothing, nothing! I had merely never known of the Bordens having a lodger before."

Before Falconbridge could demand a more particular explanation, he was startled by hearing a harsh, rasping laugh in Borden's voice, followed by a frightened exclamation of Susie's.

He wheeled in astonishment.

Hal was holding her at arm's length, an un-

natural blaze in his eyes, his cheeks reddening with a hectic flush.

"Off, witch, cockatrice!" he shrieked. "What! do you think to delude me into believing in you again? Here, you, Falconbridge!" with a frenzied side-gesture; "are you in love with my wife, no less than Frank Parsons, here? Curse you, curse you all! give me back that stolen package. I'll State-Prison you—hang you all!"

The rest was unintelligible.

A physician and one of the nurses came running from the other extremity of the ward in consternation.

"Go at once!" exclaimed the former, imperatively. "You shouldn't have been admitted, as it was. Quick, quick! or I sha'n't answer for a relapse."

As they hurried away, a discomfited group, with all their air-built hope-castles crumbling into mist, the Express messenger's delirious ravings continued to clamor after them.

However, it was not so bad as it seemed.

A relapse was escaped, and three days later Hal Borden's condition was so far improved that Susie became a daily visitant to his couch.

He seemed to have no recollection of the appalling outburst with which he had so unexpectedly terminated the initial interview; and, if still moodily reticent and reflective at times, showing that the shadow of his first suspicions might not have been wholly dissipated, notwithstanding the vindication of her character that had been vouchsafed him, he remained kind and considerate.

It was not the complete restoration of the confidence that she so longed for, but Susie tried to content herself with even this much.

Still, it was hard, hard!"

"Oh, I could bear it without a murmur!" she one day declared; "if his old self would only come back to me by never such slight degrees. But no; his coldness is there still, even under his kindness. Oh!" And then the tears, which she could manage to heroically repress in her husband's presence, would force themselves forth.

This was said one evening, about a week after Borden had begun to mend so encouragingly, when Falconbridge and Parsons had both dropped in while the tea-table was being cleared.

"You mustn't give up, my dear," said the detective, with his accustomed cheerfulness. "Hal will rapidly come to his mental, no less than his bodily, health, once he gets around again. Didn't you notice, for instance, that he was in unusually high spirits to-day?"

"In a general way, yes," Susie admitted.

"I remarked it, too," interposed Parsons.

So had Miss Elmore, it seemed; and Janet the servant, who was flitting in and about the room, paused with a look of great interest in her freckled but not uncomely face.

"Ha, I thought so," continued the detective.

"You see, the superintendent of the Cosmopolitan had called; and Hal is by this time thoroughly convinced that no particle of blame is attached to him for the loss of that money-package. On the contrary, they sympathize with him so much that—well, I've a little piece of news for you, Susie. Hal did not actually caution me against telling you."

The young wife looked up eagerly.

"What is it?"

"Your husband's salary has been going on just the same, without interruption. That for one thing!"

Susie clapped her hands.

"For one thing!" she echoed. "As if that weren't enough for one day! I had already begun to dip into our savings bank account—those hospital charges are so dear, and I will have him get all the delicacies he longs for, whether he grows or not. But now! to think of the hundred and twenty-five dollars a month still going on. And Fan!" turning her glowing face to her sister; "I'll be able to make it up to you now."

"What are you talking about, you little goose?" exclaimed Miss Fanny, half-angrily, after which she bent her handsome face lower over a half-finished dress-waist on which her nimble fingers were working. "Can't you keep private business to yourself?"

The two men understood, but pretended not to heed.

Fanny Elmore was a superb dressmaker, at which profession, with few but wealthy ladies for her customers, she had long been able to command her own price; and it certainly was a strictly private affair between the sisters if she had come to the pecuniary rescue in times of real or fancied distress.

"But you said 'that for one thing!'" cried Susie, but little abashed, as she again turned to the detective. "What is the next item of good news, then?"

"Are you sure I intimated there was anything else?" he demanded, with a surprised air.

"Come now, major, don't trifle, or I shall be seriously angry."

"Well, then, Mr. Pfeifer, the superintendent, insisted that the company should reimburse Hal for the hospital expenses heretofore incurred, and also see him through to the end. Moreover, your husband will receive permission from the physicians to come home for his con-

valescence in just one week from to-day; and he is also to return to his confidential employment with the company at the earliest hour. There you are!"

Susie clapped her hands with a feeling of pleasure she had not known for, oh! it seemed to her a long, long time now; and that almost immediately at least a part of the new light went out of her sweet face as she reflected that perhaps even these changes might not bring back the old apparently perpetual lover-days that had been with her Hal and herself.

"Why couldn't he have told me of this?" she sighed.

"Pshaw! You are quarreling with your good fortune already, Mrs. Borden," Parsons took it upon himself to answer banteringly. "Of course, he was only keeping it all back, to make the zest of your surprise the keener."

And then Miss Elmore, seeing the returned shadow still on her sister's face, interposed an entire fresh subject.

"Janet," she asked, "how do you come along with your last new beau?"

"Oh, m'am, dinna you fret!" And snatching up the last napkin and the table-cloth, Janet disappeared kitchenward, at a Highland run and with her face a garden of blushes.

Both the men looked up with smiling inquiry.

"It's a policeman," explained Miss Fanny, shortly.

"A policeman!" they echoed together.

"The one who came with you that first terrible evening, Mr. Falconbridge. Mr. Latham, the special at the Grand Central, was it not? Yes? Well, Sue and I discovered the other evening that Janet was receiving his attentions. That is all."

"Oho!" was all that Falconbridge said.

But this little piece of news seemed to have set both men to thinking, and a little later they went out in each other's company.

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG LODGER.

PARSONS and Falconbridge turned into Third avenue and walked slowly down the animated and brightly-lighted thoroughfare together.

"I say!" said the former, presently, for he and the other had become on pretty familiar terms, "looks as if Inspector Byrnes were still interested in the Bordens, eh?"

Falconbridge did not give away his private thoughts to everybody.

"Latham's making up to the Scotch girl doesn't prove that," he replied.

"You think that?"

"Yes: at least, it doesn't necessarily follow. Latham's ancestry was Scottish—I remember hearing him say so; and Janet is undeniably attractive-featured, though she is as awkward as a young cow."

"Well, I think differently."

"Why?"

Parsons looked at him significantly.

"Not another sign of your fugitive of late, eh?"

"No."

The detective's negative was a little gruff, for it was his sensitive point that the days were slipping into weeks, with hardly an additional clew as yet.

But the Bordens' lodger's next remark was even more startling than its predecessor, if somewhat more agreeably novel likewise.

"Ever think of Janet Douglas as the possible culprit?" he asked, meditatively.

"The deuce, no!" replied the detective, laughing. "Nor have you thought of her either in such a connection, I should hope, Frank."

"You're out, major," quietly said the other. "True, I have approached the theory very cautiously, but it has been forcing its way to the front in my mind with odd persistency for two or three days. This fresh item about Inspector Byrnes's man Latham already making up to the girl, also! It would seem that the theory has suggested itself to the inspector."

"Not at all; and there is nothing in it, at all events, one way or another."

"But why? The girl is of pretty much the one size with the sisters, not dissimilar in figure, though—er—younger and less-agreeably developed, as a matter of course—and, like them, she is exceptionally nice-complexioned and fresh-looking, especially in the lower face that would be visible under that tantalizing half-vail, you know, which should have become proverbial by this time."

"So are you, for that matter."

Parsons started, and then looked at his companion with a burst of laughter, in which he was presently joined by the latter.

"By Jove, though!" cried Frank; "now I think of it, there is something in what you say. Perhaps it was that which made the brakeman, Jake Gunter, interest himself in me so suddenly and unaccountably, as you were good enough to tell me about."

"Who knows?"

"And then my walk! perhaps that struck him, too. Now you notice it, major, and then guess how it would show, with my legs disguised in skirts. You remember the peculiarity on which you have all along insisted. Who knows but

that I may be your will-o'-the-wisp petticoated criminal after all? Observe!"

And pushing on ahead, with the utmost gravity, the young man went mincing along the crowded sidewalk in a way to make people stare and to evoke a fresh laugh from Falconbridge.

"Here, behave yourself!" exclaimed the latter, dragging him back and linking arms, as before. "Do you want to make me ridiculous, no less than yourself?"

"Ridiculous!"

"Yes."

"But what of that, if the ends of justice might be subserved?"

"None of your nonsense, I tell you!"

"But really, though!" still with admirable mock gravity; "was there the peculiarity in my walk, if only by a coincidence?"

"Who the deuce could decide by the way you wagged and teetered along in the specimen? Hallo!" stopping before a brilliantly lighted jeweler's window. "Here is something in which I am interested."

"In the ladies' new-fangled garter clasps? I'm not. Better come and have a drink."

"No, no; wait. The deuce! What expensive trinkets and fantastic designs! Are they really the go now in the fashionable world?"

"Of course, but I really don't see how you can be so interested in garters when not fitting neatly upon—well, where they were designed to be."

"Well, I may let you into my secret some day—if you are good."

And then the detective continued to examine the importation, which were arranged on long wires, with the clasps to the front, but without discovering any similar design to the odd one in his possession, though there were several not dissimilar.

"Hallo!" suddenly observed Parsons, who had himself become interested, apparently. "Why, there is a pair exactly like Mrs. Borden's!"

"Where?"

"There!" he was indicating with his finger; "the design of the two little padlocks linked by a chain. See?"

"Yes, now I do. And how should you know what garters Mrs. Borden wears?"

"She showed them to me directly after her husband bought them for her a month or two ago," indifferently. "Mrs. B. is too truly modest a woman to be squeamish about such a trifle, you know, and Hal was present, as a matter of course. They were still in their shop-case."

"I beg your pardon, Frank!"

The instinctive delicacy and naturalness with which the young man had made the explanation had been more than enough.

"Don't mention it. Let me see. They are pretty! I wonder what sort of a design I would select for a pretty wife of my own, if I were so lucky as to have one."

"It is all vanity," suggested Falconbridge, "though excusable in Susie Barton, of course. Still, I don't believe her sister, Miss Elmore, would care for anything of the sort?"

"Oh, they all wear garters, you know—or something to the same purpose."

"Like enough, but I referred to the new-fangled expensive sort we are looking at."

"Miss Elmore isn't averse to them, any more than her sister. In fact, she laughingly intimated as much when Hal was exhibiting the pair he had brought for Mrs. Barton. Ha, ha! There's a pair now that would make Janet Douglas's eyes water, at all events."

He pointed to a noticeably huge and ostentatious pair of the clasps, bearing a little tag, with the words, "Rolled Gold—\$2 50."

"What! can that awkward Scotch lass be already imbued with such vanities?"

"Don't talk! only last week I heard Miss Fanny calling her to task for surreptitiously disposing herself at the cottage gate in one of Mrs. Barton's new dresses. However," with a laugh, "this is hardly very masculine talk, and I am feeling like some bear. Do come along, major!"

But the conversation, trivial as it had seemed, had impressed the detective not a little; and he was not sorry when, a little later on, his companion yawned over the beer they were drinking, and said he believed he would take himself off home and to bed.

"Good-night, then," said the detective, who had picked up an illustrated newspaper. "I am less lucky than you, and shall have several business calls to make before bedtime."

Parsons, however, had no sooner strolled out of the saloon than Master Tommy Dodd entered it.

"I have kept within beck and call, according to your august commands, my liege," said the little fellow in his ridiculously deep base voice, and, seating himself at his principal's side, he gravely ingurgitated the foaming goblet of beer ordered for him like a little man.

"All right, Tommy. Wait a minute." Then after a slight pause: "Shadow Parsons till he gets home. You'll find me waiting for you here."

The boy hurried away with his customary promptitude.

But it was more than an hour later—quite eleven o'clock—before his return.

"Well?"

"He went straight home, my lord."

"Direct?"

"Yes, sir."

"What the deuce has kept you so long, then?"

"A watching of him after he got home, signor."

"What was he doing?"

"A-getting on to the Scotch gal's mysterious actions, from his cloud-capped eyrie in the cottage front porch, your Highness," with a wide grin.

"And what was there in Janet's actions to 'get on to?'

"A-promenadin' in the shade on the opposite sidewalk, sir, as if looking for the heartless mash, which was like the 'Letter that never came.' The ladies must have already retired, sir. But she gave it up at last, and then Mr. Parsons dusted indoors before she could catch him on the spy. My sovereign liege, the tale is told."

"How was the girl dressed?" the detective suddenly asked.

Tommy Dodd finished emptying his glass, which was just then at his lips, with a deprecating elevation of the brows.

"In her ordinary peasant-guise, I should say, my lord," he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"A lowly farthingale, bodice of rustic cut and texture, her shoes the coarsest, of bog-trotting mold, her hair a caroty and wondrous mass—with a black ribbon bound—"

"That will do, Tommy, my dear. I won't keep you out of your little bed any longer. That particularly modest and unassuming brain of yours must be weary."

"My liege, I go, but I shall return—after my interview with the drowsy god."

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER WILL O'THE-WISP.

THE detective had attached more importance to the Scotch girl theory than he had pretended.

At all events, he saw that, since Inspector Byrnes and Frank Parsons—perhaps not disinclined for a little amateur detective work, by way of change—were apparently thinking enough of the theory to follow it up, he might as well take a hand at the game himself.

Over a week had now passed, without his getting upon a single tangible clew to the mysterious criminal or to the stolen money-package; the Express people would soon manifest a natural impatience in the matter, if they hadn't done so already; and, added to this, he was daily growing more and more apprehensive lest his heretofore splendid reputation for prompt, daring and efficient work might suffer detriment.

Then there was to be taken into consideration the fact that the one insuperable, inexplicable mystification in the case—the fact of the woman having undeniably issued from the Borden cottage on the night of his first and crowning adventure—would be at once elucidated by identifying her with Janet, preposterous as the notion appeared at the first glance, with the indubitably native awkwardness and inexperience of the girl in consideration.

True, there would remain to be explained her *modus operandi* of getting back into the house again, in spite of what he had regarded as his invincible vigilance and activity to the contrary, but that could safely be left for after-exposition, with the will-o'-the-wisp criminal once fairly "scotched."

And then again, it would not do to run the slightest risk of being forestalled by another detective, professional or amateur, in the matter.

This thought alone was enough to set his blood leaping, and accordingly Tommy Dodd had scarcely quitted the saloon before Falconbridge followed his example.

He mechanically turned his steps in the direction of the Borden cottage, choosing a somewhat roundabout course by the way of Lexington avenue.

Mirabile visu!

The night was dark, and he had hardly taken up his watch, at about midnight on the lonely, shaded walk opposite the cottage-door, when it opened noiselessly, and out under the street-lamp once more glided the mysterious woman, the apparition, or whatever she might be designated.

As before, she paused a moment, looking leisurely up and down the street, then observed once again the hang of her skirts by a coquettish back-and-down-look over her shoulder, and then moved off with a sort of brisk stateliness in a westerly direction.

The detective stood for an instant rooted to the spot in an agony of hesitation.

Should he let her go, unfollowed, and at once enter the house, thus establishing her identity beyond peradventure with that one of the inmates who should prove absent?

Or should he once more undertake to run her down, with the less certain but more fascinating chance of clasping the handcuffs upon her felonious wrists and bringing her back in triumph?

The former was the more prudent, the latter more manly and adventurous, course.

To his infinite subsequent regret, he chose the latter.

Rapidly drawing over his shoes the pair of bright rubbers, which he invariably carried with him for just such an emergency, he started in swift but silent pursuit, his footfalls, thus muffled, giving forth not a sound upon the pavements.

But the fugitive was already a block or so away, and she seemed to be conscious of her danger by a sort of instinct.

Hardly had he started in pursuit before, with but one glance over her shoulder, she was off like the coursing wind.

"Woman or fiend!" growled the detective, putting on steam; "there is no man who has ever yet held his own with Old Falcon sleuthing at his heels, and if I don't make you wish yourself out of those fluttering petticoats in short order, I draw no knowledge from the experience of the past!"

But he was reckoning against powers of locomotion with which he was as yet but little familiar.

The fugitive did hold her own, and the derided skirts were nothing more, apparently, than wings to her easy speed.

She was little less than a marvel of go-as-you-please pedestrianism, with the top notches in preference.

She would have proved a wonder on the Roman Corso, and might have afforded points to Atalanta herself in the fabled apple-race of the mythological legend.

She seemed a very phantom of fleetness, and, after letting her pursuer come within a few rods of her, as if merely playing with him, suddenly bounded over the Park wall, and was gone, like a tantalizing vision of delight.

He followed, at a flying leap, and then on and on! for there on the nearest driveway was she flitting along once more, apparently for the mere purpose of cheating him yet further in the ghostly race.

The detective ground his teeth, and at last, gaining the open road, put on his champion sprint.

No good!

It was like the proverbial chase in a nightmare dream.

When he would sprint so would she, his momentary slackening was imitated on her own part.

She even seemed to scorn a divergence among the trees and shrubberies, where she could have readily baffled him hopelessly, and favored only the open paths and roads.

If ever a fugitive had laughed at a pursuer through the back of his head, she was thus laughing at the hard-blown pedestrian champion of the private detective profession at this blessed time.

And so it went up-hill and down, by straights and by twists, by road, by promenade and by winding bridle-path, until at last, just as the rising moon began to make both figures practically distinct in that silent and weird race amid the slumberous bushes of the great Park, he suddenly came to a dead pause on the border of a placid lake, breathless and desperate.

So did the fugitive not ten yards in advance.

He pushed forward a dozen paces or so, the advance being duplicated on the fugitive's part as faithfully and mechanically as though both were influenced by the same contrivance, as in the case of woolen soldiers glued to a child's moveable lattice toy.

But when both stopped again, she looked back once more over her shoulder, her half-vailed face showing strongly in the moonshine.

And now for the first time was the silence of that fruitless chase broken by vocal sound, the sound of her soft, clear laugh, velvety and melodious in its rippling derisiveness.

Giving way to momentary exasperation, Old Falcon stamped his foot.

"Curse you!" he roared; "I'll yet run you to earth!"

"Come on!"

It was the first time he had heard the mysterious fugitive's voice, and this was now no less mystifying than her dream-like activity.

Whose voice had shaped those musically defiant words out of human breath?

It might have been Susie's, it might have been Fanny Elmore's, and yet it might have been anyone's else.

"Come on!"

And, at the repetition of the challenge, she once more glided away, as untiringly, as effortlessly, to all appearance, as at the outset.

What use to follow?

One cannot overtake a fugitive apparition, or run down a creature of the air.

After continuing the pursuit for a few rods, he stopped in despair, and with a parting laugh, she vanished not to reappear.

The chase had led him far over to the west side of the Park.

A transverse road was, fortunately, near at hand, and Falconbridge availed himself of it, recrossed to the east side, whence he retraced his steps to the cottage.

But to what end?

Should he again make himself ridiculous by arousing the inmates, and searching the house afresh?

The fugitive would doubtless have already slipped back into the domicile and into bed—what could be impossible to the possessor of those airy and winged feet?—and there could recur only the same mystery as to which of the inmates had thus succeeded in making sport of him.

However, he remained doggedly watching the cottage till daybreak, without result.

Then he betook himself to his breakfast and his rest, with a sense of complete disheartenedness, such as had seldom come over him in his career.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW "THEORY."

But on awaking at noon of the following day, which chanced to be a Sunday, Old Falcon was more than ever impressed with the theory that Janet Douglas might be the mysterious fugitive.

If not she, who else but Susie Borden or Fanny Elmore? And the sisters could neither of them be longer suspected, under any sort of logical analysis.

He accordingly resolved to say nothing of his preceding night's adventure, and made his accustomed smiling appearance at the Borden cottage early in the afternoon, after leaving orders for Tommy Dodd to be within reach throughout the day.

Susie was not yet returned from her visit to the hospital, in Parsons's company, but Miss Fanny was at home superintending the preparation of the two o'clock Sunday dinner, with Janet flitting between kitchen and sitting-room, as usual under the circumstances.

Much to his gratification, the detective had hardly begun conversing with Miss Elmore, before she handed him a key, saying:

"That is for you, Major Falconbridge. It is the dead-latch key of our front door. Both my sister and I have thought it best for you to have one, in view of what has occurred, and Hal was of the same opinion on being consulted."

The detective thanked her, and put the key in his pocket.

"This is quite a trust to repose in me, Miss Elmore," he said, smiling. "I hope you won't repent of it."

"We are easy on that score, major."

"But if I should once more get on the heels of our phantomess, as perhaps we may call her, on your threshold, you mustn't be startled at my slipping into the house without a particle of ceremony."

"That is what we shall expect. Anything will be preferable to this wearing mystery and suspense."

"What is the matter with you, Janet?" he asked of the girl, who was just then laying the table. "You seem out of sorts to-day."

Janet blushed, stammered, and with some evasive reply, found occasion to return to the kitchen, as if to avoid his keen and searching eyes.

"Janet is out of sorts," explained Miss Elmore. "I shouldn't wonder if she would leave us before long, much as we have grown to like her."

"May I ask why, Miss Fanny?"

"Why not, major? The mystery of the vanishing woman seems to be wearing upon her even more than upon the rest of us. She is superstitious, and is quite convinced there is something supernatural about it all."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and then Janet is growing too fond of the men. We are sure she must have been out very late last night, without our permission, and I doubt not that this Latham must have been off with her to some entertainment or other."

"Jim should know better. I'll give him a hint, if you think it worth while."

"No; I wouldn't do that—at least not yet. He may be honorably fond of the girl, for he is also Scotch, or of Scottish descent, I understand. It might mean a good husband for Janet."

"You have always found her trustworthy?"

"Oh, yes; as hired girls go."

"Excuse me if I seem a little officious in my inquiries."

"You ought to know that you are privileged, major," with her pretty smile. "What are detectives for?"

"I assure you I am not altogether certain," laughing. "However, thank you! Parsons said something about the girl's fondness for dress and ornaments."

"Ha! Frank has given poor Janet away, then, with regard to that dress of Susie's? It was no great matter, though I scolded her roundly, I can tell you. Yet there are odd contradictions in the girl's character, too."

"In what way, pray?"

"Well, in spite of her developed fondness for finery, there is no diminution, apparently, in her inherent and native canniness—that is the best name for scotch parsimony, isn't it?"

"I believe so; they also call it being 'near.' She is fond of money, then?"

"Inordinately; and yet we are certain she is as honest as gold."

"A fine, strong girl, I should say."

"Strong? Janet is as strong as a horse. Though not yet eighteen, I doubt if there are many athletic club young men who are her muscular superiors; and she can run like a deer, apparently without knowing what fatigue is."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we had an experience of it when Susie's pocketbook was snatched last Decoration Day, as we were all on our way to view the parade. Janet chased the pickpocket a good mile through Central Park, fairly running him down at last, and seemed as fresh at the close as at the outset of the race. The policemen, into whose custody she handed the fellow over, said they had never seen anything like it, and were sure Janet could make money and her mark in a go-as-you-please match."

"Why this is quite extraordinary!"

"Janet is just that—in her way."

"I—er—should think a woman's skirts would interfere with her emulation in that line."

"They didn't seem to in her case at all. You wouldn't expect it of a raw Highland girl, but, even at the top of her speed, she has a way of covering her ground with a sort of gliding step that would discount a Spanish lady's 'melody of motion,' as it is called."

"It is odd. She has a pretty voice, too."

"Yes; Janet might sing well, with instruction. Her laugh, especially, is very liquid and sweet."

At this juncture Mrs. Borden returned home from the hospital with Parsons, and nothing would do but that he and the detective should remain to dinner.

Susie was in unusual good spirits, and could only talk of her husband, who had apparently been kinder than his custom, and over whose return to his own home she was feverishly hopeful and expectant.

"He will surely come next Saturday," she said. "The doctors are positive that he will be strong enough, and he can already sit quite upright in bed without much discomfort. He even takes some of his meals in that way, without having to lie down once to rest himself. Oh, dear! I hope he will find no fault with the change to his own room. But I shall do just nothing but nurse and wait on him."

Falconbridge, however, under cover of interesting himself in her talk and Miss Fanny's was jealously observing Parsons, whose secret study of Janet, whenever the latter chanced to be busy about the table, was but little to her liking.

"Blast Frank!" he thought; "what a sly-boot the fellow can be. Of course, he is dead sure of the truth of his suspicions now, and will do his level best to get ahead of me with his detective work. But I'll have him discover that it's a deeper game than any of his devising at which two cannot play; though," discontentedly, "there is no denying he has the advantage of me in living here under the same roof with the girl."

There were no new developments, however, in this regard for the ensuing twenty-four hours, though the detective received an unexpected revelation of a theretofore altogether unsuspected sort.

At about eight o'clock of the forthcoming evening, he was again approaching the cottage, with master Tommy Dodd strolling at his side in his Sunday best, when it occurred to him to essay the efficacy of entering it unperceived with the latch-key with which he had been trusted.

Save for a faint light in the parlor window, the place had the appearance of being temporarily deserted, as, quitting his companion's side, he stepped noiselessly through the gate and into the porch, or vestibule.

The key worked to a charm, and it was in the hand of an adept.

In an instant he was in the little hall-entry, at the foot of the stairs, with the street-door closed behind him, and without the slightest sound having accompanied his entrance.

He was under the impression that the house was empty, when suddenly a short, indignant feminine sob, accompanied by a man's voice in pleading tones, was heard from the living and dining-room combined, between the parlor and the kitchen.

Then was heard Mrs. Borden's voice, still with tears in it, but proudly severe.

"After what has passed, sir," it exclaimed, "I can no longer have you an inmate of my house! It is not to be thought of! I should deem any leniency on my part an insult to my husband."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

THE Falcon Detective's first impulse was to steal out of the house as silently as he had entered it, without listening to another word.

But the words which suddenly followed in Parsons's voice were such as to make him feel that he could not but choose to remain as at least a temporary eavesdropper in the interest of both Hal and Susie, to say nothing of the unexpected insight into a dark side of the lodger's character which was thus afforded him.

"Oh, but you will, you must forgive me!"

Parson's voice was heard to entreat, with the lingerings of a fierce passion in it. "Do pardon me, and I will never, never offend again. Think in my excuse that it was your beauty which thus caused me to forget myself in that rash, that miserable declaration! Think, Susie—"

"Don't you dare address me by my first name—never again, sir!" was the other's angry interruption. "Otherwise, I—I shall have you brought to account for it, sir!"

"Still, pity me! I'll henceforth be the humblest of your slaves, but only let me retain my quarters here. Don't drive me away!"

"I don't want any slaves, I won't have slaves—I want and will have every man's respect! You to dare to speak of love to me, a married woman, who, you should know, loves and cares for but one man on earth—my husband! You!"

"Oh, but at least consider how I misled myself! You are generous, you will do that. I could not but see how cruelly unjust he had grown to you. I could not but remember—pardon me the allusion, but I must make a clean breast of my temptation, no less than my sin—I could not but remember how it was generally thought at first that it was your elder sister Fanny who was his chief attraction, not your beautiful self, and how strange it seemed to every one when he changed so suddenly."

"Silence, sir!" chokingly.

"No, no; let me go on to the end. How could I, with others, but think that you might not have really loved Hal so absolutely but that—Ah, but I find that I cannot go on!"

"I should think not!"

"Forgive me, that is all! Mrs. Borden, I perceive not only my mistake, but my crime, my baseness; and I swear to you that I shall never offend again, never even look at you covertly, save with honor and respect, as my friend's faithful wife, as the best, the truest, the most stainless woman I have ever known. Only do not drive me away from your house!"

There was much more of the same sort on both sides.

It ended in Susie relenting so far as to consent to her lodger retaining his room to the end of the month—about two weeks thence—and no longer; but on the sole condition that all intimacy of friendship, save the mere observance of outward amenities, was thenceforth to cease between them personally.

Then the detective, with a vastly augmented opinion of the young wife's womanhood and a corresponding diminution of his appreciation for Mr. Frank Parsons, slipped away, and rejoined his little assistant, unperceived by Miss Elmore, who was returning from evening church service in Janet Douglas's company.

He was disposed on reflection, however, to regard the young man's offense with somewhat severity.

True, he had been contemptibly dishonorable in the design and attempt to make love to his friend's wife. But something was to be excused to the beat of the blood in a lonely bachelor of thirty-two or three whose canons of morality were doubtless vitiated by a lifetime's experience amid the temptations of New York free life. And it seemed undeniable that he had been sincere and manly in his repentance.

Moreover, had not Hal Borden's ungenerous treatment of his wife since the inception of this criminal mystery been such as to afford such a young fellow just the sort of encouragement as was most likely to fan the guilty weakness or admiration, of which he had been culpable, into flame? As to the other disclosure, of which the detective had theretofore been blissfully ignorant, concerning Fanny's prior attractions for Borden, aent the latter's marriage with Susie, he still knew too little of the situation to consider it as an additional factor in the young man's case.

Falconbridge continued his watch upon the cottage, with Tommy Dodd's companionship, that night till after midnight, but without further result.

The next night's watch, however, was not devoid of interest.

He had purposely avoided visiting the cottage during the day, and had not even called upon Borden at the hospital, thinking it well enough to keep himself a little aloof for the time being, and yet all the time tortured more or less with the growing apprehension lest either Latham or Parsons might steal a march upon him in the successful evolution of the Scotch girl-impersonation theory.

Tommy Dodd was again with him when he once more took up his secret watch upon the cottage at about ten o'clock.

The night was cloudy, with neither moon nor stars.

Half an hour later, a man, closely muffled against the sharp night-air, passed slowly before the house, and, after apparently inspecting it curiously, slipped out of the full glare of the street-lamp, and sounded a whistle thrice.

"That must be Latham," whispered the servant detective to his companion. "Be spry."

Tommy flitted across the street unobserved by the new-comer, and concealed himself behind a tree but a few paces distant from the street-lamp, from which he could be within earshot of whatever confidences might be presently ex-

changed, provided the fellow retained the watchful position he had chosen.

After some little delay, the door opened and Janet emerged, bareheaded and with a plaid shawl muffled about her form.

As the man signed to her, she fearlessly approached him, but almost instantly started back with an exclamation of surprise and disappointment.

"Come here!" the fellow growled in a gruff but low voice—and it wasn't Special Detective Latham's voice either; "or it will be worse for you!"

The girl did not seem intimidated, but hesitated a moment, after which she marched up to him like a grenadier; even following him further away from the lamp, though rather in defiance of than obedience to a strangely menacing gesture on his part.

This, of necessity, enforced a change of base on the part of Master Tommy Dodd, and several colloquial exchanges passed between the couple before he could again get within earshot.

All he heard was just this from the girl:

"Gang awa' wi' ye, ye hulking big fule! Dinnna you speak to me again, or it wull be the wor' for yourself!"

And then she hurried back to the gate, where she remained looking back her defiance.

Her baffled interviewer seemed to hesitate, and then, shaking his fist at her, he strode on amid the deepening shadows.

The Falcon Detective was after the man in an instant.

"So, Mr. Jake Gunter!" he exclaimed, laying his heavy hand upon the fellow's shoulder; "you are at the resumption of your old trick with but little delay, I perceive."

Gunter—for it was indeed he, looking very thin, but no less sinister, and still showing the etiolation of his hospital experience—started violently, but was rather angry than abashed at perceiving the detective.

"Ha! you again, eh?" he growled. "And the day after the fair—just a leetle too late, as usual, major!"

"That is to be seen," irritably. "When did you quit the hospital?"

"This morning, if it does you any good to know."

"And you are already trying your blackmailing dodge afresh?"

"What is that to you?"

"Perhaps more than you think," menacingly. "Before trifling with me, or trying to, remember that parting whisper in your ear at our first interview in the hospital."

"Who's tryin' to trifle?" more civilly.

"You've no right to be always interfering with me."

"I'll make it my right when it suits my convenience, as it happens to do just now."

"Cut in, then!" sullenly.

"You've then dropped to your first impression that Mrs. Borden might have been her husband's assailant?"

"I should say so! To her pretty sister, too, for that matter. Who wouldn't after that hospital unveilin'? Her husband, Hal Borden, is an infernal jackass not to drop to it, too. Perhaps he would, if he knew as much as some folks."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BRAKEMAN.

"YOURSELF, for example?" suggested Falconbridge.

The brakeman shrugged his still brawny shoulders.

"Have it that way, if you choose," he replied, with a sort of snort.

"So at last you, too, have adopted the new theory?"

"A new theory, yes—perhaps!" with non-committal caution.

"And you really imagine that in that raw girl you have spotted the criminal counterfeiter of Susie Borden's personality?"

The fellow fairly bounded back, so great was his apparent surprise.

Then he gave his questioner a quick, searching look, and then burst into his disagreeable laugh.

"Oho!" he slowly ejaculated.

The detective was puzzled. If Gunter did not suspect Janet herself, who else?

"What do you mean?" he sharply demanded.

"Why nothing, Mr. Falconbridge, of course. So you've really tumbled to my new suspicion, eh?"

"But is it really the Scotch girl that you suspect?"

"Why, of course! Whom else could it be, with the two ladies out of the way?"

The detective was still dissatisfied. They had been walking westward while conversing, and had now come to a pause under the Park wall, at the Seventy-second street side entrance.

"You're a pretty deep one, Jake," he observed.

"Do you really think so, major?" with pretended self consciousness.

"Well, you've a way of preserving silence, even with your tongue going."

"Still water runs deep, major," with a

grin, "even when there's a mill-clapper in the distance."

"I've warned you not to attempt trifling with me."

"But I'm not trifling, Cap. What do you want to know?"

"Your object in trying to interview the girl, Janet Douglas, to-night."

"But you've already found out that I suspect her—that I've tumbled to your own new theory, you know."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Well, by Jingo! I don't see how I can make it any plainer."

"Yes, you can."

"What a splendiferous detective you are, Mr. Falconbridge, a-dodgin' after ammychures for such p'nts as you can't raise for yourself!"

There was so much suggestion of truth in this sneer that the detective kept his temper with difficulty.

"Look here, my man," he continued, sternly, "you'll tell me just what you do suspect before we part!"

"Will I?"

"You are aware that I could jail you on the spot, if I chose; while a subsequent telegram to the Chicago authorities might awaken some solicitude concerning you in that quarter."

Gunter drew a long breath, and then set his teeth together.

"Do your worst!" he then resolutely replied, with an oath. "No one can prove as it was me that throwed that brick."

"Dare you to defy me?"

"It looks a little like it, eh? Now, look here, major—"

He started back with an exclamation of supreme astonishment, which was not without an echo from his companion.

The mysterious woman was at that instant gliding past them.

They recovered at once, but she had already vanished into the Park entrance, with a contemptuous wave of the hand.

Gunter, with an oath, at once darted in pursuit.

The detective followed more slowly and hesitatingly. His former experience was not such as to make him eager for a second attempt at running down that fugitive.

Both the latter and her pursuer had been swallowed up by the shadows of the winding path.

Then Falconbridge heard something like an indistinct groan.

He hurried in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

A moment later he came upon the prostrate body of Gunter at the foot of an ornamental fountain of iron, against which it had apparently been dashed with crushing force.

"Hallo! Stabbed again?" he exclaimed, assisting the man to his feet.

The man's hat was off, showing blood on his brow, but he growled out a negative, and, on being assisted to the fountain, eagerly laved his forehead with the cold water.

Then he looked up with a curse.

"What did she hit you with?" asked the detective.

"Her fist! Holy smoke! I thought the sky had fallen on my head. Cap, do you chance to see my hat anywhere? Thank'ee. I'm feeling sort of dizzy, and reckon I'll go home."

"I would, if I were you," and Falconbridge followed him up the path and out of the Park. "In fact, I shouldn't blame you for feeling somewhat discouraged, Jake."

"Perhaps not; good-night, major!"

Instantly on separating from Gunter, Falconbridge angrily retraced his steps in the direction of the cottage, solely intent upon Tommy Dodd's supposed dereliction in failing to follow upon the track of the veiled woman, who he could not doubt, must have issued therefrom, as heretofore.

But, Tommy was nowhere to be seen, and the immediate vicinity of the cottage, at the first glance, seemed to be wholly deserted.

Then a muffled, wheezing sort of little cry struck the detective's ear.

He looked about him without discovering its source.

It was repeated, apparently from somewhere over his head.

He looked up, and then, in spite of the increased mystification of the occasion, he could not avoid bursting into a laugh.

Guided by the rays of the street-lamp, he perceived indistinctly under the first boughs of the neighboring tree, and fastened to its trunk, the struggling form of his little co-laborer in the criminal-taking profession.

Tommy had been securely gagged, with a flaring silk handkerchief which he had worn about his neck under his overcoat, after which he had been stripped of the latter and fastened to the tree with the same garment, the arms of which, after being passed about his throat, had been tied on the opposite side of the slender stem.

"Well?" was the detective's initial inquiry, when he had effected the youth's release and set him on his feet.

Tommy maintained his perpendicular with difficulty at first, and fell to wheezing afresh as

his master helped him on with his overcoat, but his ruling passion was to the fore, even under these untoward circumstances.

"By St. Marc!" he managed to splutter out at last; "a hard stroke of fortune, my lord duke!"

"Come along!"

And, leading him away, the detective took him into a beer saloon on the adjacent Third avenue, where he lost no time in bringing him to book.

Tommy had to empty two goblets of the Gambrinian beverage hand-running, before he could thoroughly recover both his breath and his *amour propre*.

Then he rather surprised his principal by exclaiming, reproachfully:

"Do you really think it was the square thing, boss—leaving me entirely alone to tackle eight or ten John L. Sullivans in petticoats, and single-handed, at that?"

CHAPTER XVI.

TOMMY DODD'S MISHAPS.

FALCONBRIDGE stared.

"What do you mean by such preposterous assertions, you little rascal?" he exclaimed.

Tommy took on a grieved expression, and rather sadly intimated his willingness for another glass of beer.

"Abuse me as you will, my liege," he murmured, obsequiously. "When is magnanimity or pity shown to a conquered man, even though he may have battled to the death against parlous odds?"

"Come, come!" said the detective, impatiently. "I want more facts and fewer men in buckram, my young friend, or you and I shall quarrel."

Then Master Dodd smiled.

"But, good Lord, Cap! I'm not stretching it so *very* much," he urged. "That woman is a whole team in herself."

"What woman?"

"The veiled woman. I took her for Mrs. Borden at first, but, bless you, that little lady couldn't have overcome *me*, you know."

"Perhaps, not. Answer my questions."

"I'm your own daisy, boss."

"Was it Janet who thus disposed of you?"

"The Scotch? Bless you, no! She went back into the cottage even before you joined the chap she had been talking to."

"Ah! and the veiled woman came out of it later on?"

"Right you are, my sovereign! I'd wear a crown myself, if I could guess that rarely."

"Peace! How much later on?"

"Say fifteen minutes, though I didn't consult my watch. You see, there wasn't exactly the golden opportunity."

"What happened?"

"I made a jump for her, my liege."

"Ah!"

"Yes. You see, I thought it would be quite a feather in my hat if I should be able to capture the mystery single-handed—might earn me knighthood at your hands, you know."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, boss," and Tommy scratched his head a little ruefully, as he descended to more prosaic speech, "the deuce of it was that the mystery captured me."

"That was sufficiently apparent. How did it happen?"

"A conundrum, signor! Her mysterious ladyship is a regular humper in both strength and spryness. That is about all I know about it. There wasn't a word spoken, but only an incomprehensible movement or two, and there I was! Further the deponent sayeth not."

And Tommy ordered some more beer on his own responsibility.

"I don't often say turkey when in company with billionaires," he remarked, beamingly. "But, reverend sir, here's to all the hair off your head just the same!"

The Falcon Detective started out of his reverie.

"Come!" he said, impatiently; "finish your beer, Tommy, and we'll go."

"Back to watch for her ladyship's return?"

"A Jack-o'-lantern's return!" bitterly. "As if she couldn't have slipped back while we've been talking here, or sailed home on a broomstick, for that matter! No, no; we've lost another chance through our stupidity, and must wait for yet another, if the witch should be so accommodating as to afford it. Come along!"

But, for all his exasperation, Falconbridge was now more firmly convinced than ever that Janet Douglas was the masquerader, and his impatience to forestall his rivals (as he had come to deem Latham and Parsons in the affair) amounted to little less than a fever of the blood and brain.

"If I don't pretty soon bring this matter to a head," he muttered, while dressing himself on the following morning, "they'd better dub me jackdaw in lieu of the Falcon Detective! I'll deserve the reproach, and worse, too."

His ill-humor was by no means diminished by Tommy Dodd knocking at his door, a few minutes later, to say that a verbal message had just been brought from the Express Office requesting

the detective's attendance there at the earliest convenience.

"Come in here!" growled Falconbridge.

"I am here!" and Tommy was in the room with his champion high-tragedy strut, adding in a deep stage whisper: "The Duke's Motto, by Jingo!"

"Have done with that! You've had Jake Gunter, one of the brakemen on the New Haven road, pointed out to you before this, probably?"

"Yes, boss."

"He was the man in conversation with Janet last night, whom I subsequently followed. Get onto him as soon as you can, and shadow him like wax till you hear from me again. He can't have returned to his employment yet, but will doubtless be chiefly found around the Grand Central. And, while you are about it, keep an eye on Jim Latham, too. He is on detailed duty there at twelve o'clock."

The manikin made his exaggerated obeisance, and disappeared.

As the detective expected and dreaded, he was merely wanted at the Express Office to hear some good-naturedly urgent inquiries as to his progress in the pursuit of Borden's assailant and the stolen money-package.

He, however, put on his most inscrutable and confident air.

"I can still only report progress, without disclosing particulars," was his cautious reply.

"Still a little vague, eh?" and the superintendent looked by no means overcome with gratification.

"I didn't say that, sir."

"Look here, major; we're getting impatient over the delay. That's about the size of it."

"Naturally enough, my dear sir."

"Now," continued Mr. Pfeifer, "if you could only set a period when you might have the mystery permanently solved for us, it might serve to keep our Board of Directors in a better humor. See?"

Falconbridge had great faith in sudden impulses, on his own part, no matter how stimulated.

"I'll do so, sir," he said, stung into a sort of desperation. "It is now Tuesday. You shall have the mystery solved, if not the money-package restored—I can't answer for that so promptly—before the close of the present week. How will that do?"

"Excellently! Good-day and good-luck, Major Falconbridge."

"Too late to chop logic or split hairs now!" growled the detective to himself, as he strode out of the office. "I must do something, or my reputation is a goner."

It was now about noon, and on his way to the Grand Central, which he intended to make on foot, as perhaps the better for general reflection, he met with a surprise.

At the entrance to a gilded den on Bleeker street, west of the Bowery, which was a notorious evil resort, he perceived Mr. Frank Parsons in earnest conversation with a man well known as a bunco-steerer and hard character generally.

Not a little mystified—for though he knew Parsons as a young fellow of somewhat rapid proclivities, he had never yet suspected him of anything "crooked"—the detective slipped into an opposite doorway, and watched the pair.

Parsons seemed cool and self-possessed, while his companion's manner was more or less vehement.

They presently separated, however, apparently in good-humor, the Borden lodger lounging off toward Broadway with his usual *nonchalant* air, and the crook disappearing into the saloon.

After a moment's reflection, Falconbridge followed the latter.

The crook, who was known as Preacher Walsh, by reason of his ministerial suavity in approaching a prospective victim, was just taking his seat in the rear part of the saloon at a round table where a flashy party of men and women were drinking and playing cards, when he caught the detective's eye.

He instantly rose and hurried forward with a nervous smile, in response to the mute summons, while his companions proceeded with their game in a noticeably less demonstrative manner.

"Have a drink, Preacher," was the detective's greeting, with a gesture over the elaborately ornamental bar-rail against which he was leaning; and then while the softly-designated decoctions were in the course of preparation by the immaculate shirt-bosomed, dazzling breast-pinned bartender, he said, in a low voice:

"New pal of yours, eh—the airy chap you were talking with outside just now?"

The rogue gave him a quick look, which encountered a keener one in response.

"Not exactly, major," was the reply. "He is on the dead quiet."

"Aren't you all, for that matter? What does he call himself?"

"Mr. Franks."

"But what is he?"

"A mystery."

"Come, come!"

"I'm giving it to you straight, major," said

the fellow, earnestly. "The man is a mystery, to most of us at least, as yet. If he's crooked in any way, it's in a racket that none of us seem to have caught on to; and yet it's certain that he's got a secret pull with some of the 'fences.'"

"You were pretty thick with him just now."

"I'm broke, and was trying to tap him for a tenner or two, but it was no go."

"How could you make the attempt, while knowing so little about him?"

"Well, a man's got a right to a suspicion, I suppose, and to try a dicker on the strength of it."

"You suspect his connection with some recent crime?"

"Now you're shouting."

"What crime?"

"Major, ask me when my memory is better. Here's to you," and Preacher Walsh absorbed his cocktail.

Falconbridge paid for the two drinks, without touching his own.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"Yes, I do," bluntly. "And there's nothing new against me you can get on to, either. By-by, major!"

Falconbridge laughed.

"Don't be too secure in your virtuous self-confidence, Preacher," was his parting remark. "Your want of that tenner or two might lead you astray."

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE GRAND CENTRAL.

SEEING nothing of Tommy Dodd about the entrances or in any of the waiting-rooms, the detective, soon after his arrival at the Grand Central Depot, was on his way to the train-yard for a chat with Mike Dalton, the gatekeeper, when he encountered Jim Latham.

"Hold on, major," cried the latter, stopping the private detective, with a peculiar smile.

"Got on to anything as yet?"

"Oh, the deuce!" replied Falconbridge, with pretended impatience. "You don't suppose I really take any stock in your Scotch girl theory, I hope?"

To his surprise, Latham—who was a fine-looking man, by the way—only flushed in a sheepish way.

"I don't exactly follow you, major," he said. "But for all that, you won't say anything against Miss Douglas, if you care a cent for my feelings."

Some more words were interchanged, at the end of which Falconbridge began to open eyes, in a metaphorical sense.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, at last; "do you really mean to hint to me that you're sincerely in love with the lass, Jim?"

Latham grew redder still.

"Well, I mean this, anyway," he blurted out, "I won't have the young woman spoken of disrespectfully."

"And you've never had any 'theory' about Miss Douglas?"

"Theory!"

"Any professional notion, I mean, as to her being possibly some—some other person too, besides what she really is?"

"Thunder and lightning! you don't mean as connected with Hal Borden's assailant—Mrs. Borden's mysterious double?"

Falconbridge nodded.

Latham at first looked angry, and then he slapped his thigh, and fairly roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Janet, Highland Janet, masquerading as that female Guy Fawkes! Ho, ho, ho! What numskull could believe such a thing? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Falcon Detective, catching the bilious infection, but from a totally different cause—he was so rejoiced to know that he had one rival the less in the Scotch-girl theory. "That's so! It is a screamer, isn't it? Ho, ho, ho!"

"To the deuce with the mystery!" cried Latham, partly recovering his gravity at last. "I told the inspector long ago that it was to be solved outside the Borden cottage, if anywhere, and he took the case out of my hands. What he has since done with it, I neither know nor care."

"Jim Latham, you're a good fellow—a deuced good fellow."

And, in separating, Falconbridge wrung the other's hand in unaffected cordiality, though he couldn't but believe that there was a sad shock in store for him, on his learning eventually—which was not to be doubted for a moment, of course—of Highland Janet's identification with the mysterious female criminal.

"Seen anything of my little man, Tommy Dodd, Mike?" the detective asked of the yard gatekeeper, a few minutes later.

"Yes, he was about some time ago," was the reply. "But soon after Jake Gunter was having the muss with Mr. Simmons he got out of sight somewhere. Anything new in the case, major?"

"Nothing whatever; it hangs, Mike, it hangs! You know what that means."

"I should say so. Pity, too!"

"What is this about Gunter and Conductor Simmons?"

"What! haven't you heard?"

Falconbridge shook his head.

"Well, ever since Jake got out of the hospital he has been hanging around the up-stairs offices—not to get back on his train, the blamed jackass! but to be put on some sort of secret service, you know."

"Secret service?"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha! He's one of your smart Alecks, who imagines that he's got on to a secret clew to Hal Borden's assailant, and, consequently, to the Express money-package."

"Oho!"

"Yes; and he's been aching for amateur detective work, in the interest of the company, to clear the thing up."

"So! Well, why wouldn't they give him a chance, if he really has got a clew?"

"That is just it! He won't give 'em even an inkling of it, but simply noses around looking cunning and wise, like a sick owl."

"Ah!"

"So finally they doubtless came to the conclusion that any one else with common sense would, that he hasn't got a clew to his name, but is only anxious for good pay with no work."

"I begin to see."

"They not only wouldn't have anything to do with him, major, but even refused to reinstate him in his employment when he made application for it this morning. I suppose they've at last found him out for the blasted, skulking galoot that he really is. That's about the long and short of it."

"I understand. But his row with Simmons?"

"Oh, it's all out of one piece. Simmons still runs the train that had poor Hal's car on that day, you remember."

"Yes."

"And there's the same train pulling out now, by the way; just as it did that afternoon you and I were watching it, and thought Hal might be drunk, when he'd already got the knife between his shoulders."

"No; it was you suggested that, Mike; though I reluctantly feared it might be so."

"Guess you're right, major."

"But what of Simmons now?"

"Oh, Gunter has somehow got it into his crop that Simmons had advised against his re-employment. At all events, he was so abusive in the lip he gave him an hour or two ago that we bounced him out of the yard. That is all there is to it."

After the exchange of a few commonplaces, Falconbridge said good-day to the honest gate-man.

On his way back through the monster depot, he was fortunate enough to perceive the object of his solicitude looking for him at the front entrance.

"Here I am, boss!" and the little fellow touched his hat.

"I have learned the news about Gunter hereabouts, Tommy. Where did you follow him to after his bounce out of the yard?"

"To the Cosmopolitan Express Co.'s offices."

"The deuce!"

"Sure as a gun, boss!"

"Oh, I don't doubt your report, Tommy. Did he get the ear of the superintendent?"

"For a short time."

"You couldn't get an inkling as to with what effect, I suppose?"

"My liege lord, inklings I always achieve, if nothing more."

"Go on."

"Well, just as Mr. Pfeifer was showing the galoot out, with a first-class, bang-up, jumping-big flea in his ear, I heard him say: 'Nonsense, my man! if you really had such an important clew as you pretend, you would not be so close-mouthed about it. I must refer you to Major Falconbridge, as our sole representative in the affair.'"

"Aha! that wasn't so bad," and the detective began to feel on better terms with himself than for several days. "Well, what of Gunter after that?"

"He's somewhere around here now, looking for you, like enough. I shadowed him to the waiting-rooms less than ten minutes ago."

"I see him now. Disappear, Tommy, it's just as well he should not know you as connected with me."

The lad obeyed with his customary cleverness, and a few moments later the ex-brakeman came hurrying up to the detective, who seemed to have his eyes and thoughts far elsewhere until accosted.

"I say, Mr. Falconbridge!" began the fellow.

"Ah, it is you, Jake?"

"Yes, sir," hesitatingly and under suppressed excitement. "Could I have a few words in private with you, sir?"

"Well, let me see," consulting his watch. "Ye-es, I suppose so, if they are quite few, you know."

A secluded nook in one of the waiting-rooms was selected, and then Gunter, with a resumption of his low cunning air, began:

"You've doubtless thought to yourself before this, Mr. Falconbridge," said he, "that I might have some clew in this stabbing and Express package case worth knowing, eh, sir?"

"Well, perhaps so."

"You've not been out in your surmises, sir. I have not only a clew, but *the* clew!"

"Ah, indeed! the master-key of the situation, eh?"

"You bet, old hoss!" with boisterous familiarity.

"Well, don't make a shouting jackass of yourself if you have, Jacob. It isn't the right thing."

"Oh, sir; really I didn't intend any disrespect!"

"That is all right."

"Well, I've got the master-clew, you know."

"No I don't; I only know that you say you have."

"But you'd say so yourself, if you only knew what it is."

"Let me judge for myself then. What is your clew?"

"Ha! that's telling."

"Of course it would be! What the deuce have you brought me here for?"

"I say, major," confidentially, "mightn't we go into partnership over this thing?"

Falconbridge laughed in his face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JAKE GUNTER'S CLEW.

THE ex-brakeman was only momentarily abashed, if at all.

"I didn't think you would be so infernally high-toned," he observed, "or I might have carried my boss clew elsewhere for a market."

"Oh, I'm as democratic as any man you'll find, my man. Then you haven't offered to dispose of this alleged information to any one else?"

"Not to a living soul, so help me?"

"Ahem! I should think the railroad nobs here might be accessible."

"What! in a dicker with a poor chap like me? Not much! Besides, I wouldn't trust 'em."

"How about the Express people?"

"Come now, major!" almost with emotion; "you can't think so mean of me as to suppose I'd carry my pig in a poke to that market?"

"But why not?"

"And back-cap you—get you out of a job?" indignantly. "No, sir; not if there were thousands in it for the mere reaching after it!"

"Mr. Gunter," suavely, "it's odd I shouldn't have known you better before this. I never up to this minute even suspected what an extraordinary chap you are."

"Oh, it's nothing; though I'm generally accounted a good fellow by my friends."

"Pardon me, I didn't say good, but extraordinary."

"Oh, but in what way?"

"As the most thorough-paced, bang-up, unmitigated liar I have yet come across. In fact," admiringly, "you can positively take the cake for asinine mendacity—the belt is yours, you have raked the jack-pot, the fluttering laurels for perjured and hypocritical prevarication are already upon your brows. Sir, your hand! I am proud to recognize transcendence even in falsehood."

And the detective really shook the discomfited rogue's hand with such earnestness as to well nigh dislocate his arm.

"Holy Mackerel! give us a rest!" exclaimed Jake, nursing his arm. "What a grip you have got, major! And do you forget that I'm still scarcely more than convalescent?"

"I had forgotten that, my man. I have still time for a few more lies, if you've got them handy."

"Oh, that be blowed! I might have known you wouldn't believe even the truth from my lips."

"You are just from trying to sell your alleged secret to Superintendent Pfeifer of the Cosmopolitan Express Company. I had you shadowed, and can repeat, word for word, his contemptuous words in virtually kicking you out of his office. Your prior attempt to dispose of it was at the offices in this building, as is now an open secret throughout the platforms and yards. Even your subsequent request to be taken back in your former employment was denied. Don't trouble yourself to answer me one way or another, my little man. My admiration for your consummate cheap villainy would not be altered in either case."

But Gunter was little, if any, abashed, though he scratched his head as though slightly non-plussed.

"Now, major," he at last resumed, with renewed earnestness, "apart from these little discrepancies which you seem to have discovered in my minor assertions—and what diamond is without its infinitesimal flaw, for that matter?—all I've got to say is, that I've, nevertheless, got the master-key to the situation, as you elegantly designated it."

"No more than I have!"

Gunter gave him a queer look that, somehow, did not seem wholly the offspring of his vulgar cunning.

"A big mistake, major! it is not in your possession—you're altogether out!"

Funker made no reply.

"Moreover," continued Gunter, with increased impressiveness, "you'd never be able to guess the truth, if you'd cudgel your intellect for a hundred years, on a fish diet, to boot.

Even I only got on to it by the queerest sort of accident."

The detective still remained silent. He felt greatly like sending the fellow about his business for the cheap impostor that he imagined him to be, and yet there was something now in his manner that had not been apparent at first—if not a species of sincerity, a profound eagerness that answered for it, and seemed over and beyond the self-conscious assumption that was his characteristic offensiveness.

"I do not believe you," he said at last. "You have merely conceived the notion that the Scotch girl, Janet, is the masquerader in Mrs. Barton's personality."

"So, that is *your* theory, is it?"

"Call it so, if you like."

Gunter gave an unaffectedly contemptuous laugh.

"Go ahead!" said he, rising. "It seems that you and I can't do business."

He turned resolutely to go.

"Wait!" the detective's hand was on his shoulder. "Satisfy me on one point, and I'll at least take some stock in your claims to superior information."

"Well, then?" and Gunter resumed his seat, though with a marked indifference not noticeable in him before. "Pitch in!"

"I know you are willing and even anxious to levy black-mail on occasion."

"Oh, rot! if that is all you have got to say—"

"Not all quite. But, on such premises, why should you go elsewhere for the disposal of your secret than to the criminal herself, of whom you could safely demand half her booty (as, if you will remember, I indeed once overheard you do) as the price of your secrecy?"

"Come, now, that ain't half-bad!"

"You see, the best reward you could hope for from either the Express or the railroad companies—or what you could command from a partnership with myself, either, for that matter—would be nothing like a share and share alike in the ten thousand dollar package."

"You're right there, major."

"Satisfy me on this point then. Why have you given up the notion of dealing with the actual criminal?"

Gunter drew a long breath.

"You won't believe me, if I do explain," he answered.

"I'll try to."

"Well, then, in the first place it's too difficult to get hold of her."

"That will do for one reason."

"In the next place, she'd probably continue to laugh me to scorn, as you heard the witch do in the first instance—with that knife in my ribs in the way of a sauce."

"We'll let that go as Reason No. 2."

"And for No. 3—there's only this one left—even if she did treat with me, I'd be mortally in fear of my life from that moment."

"What would you be afraid of?"

"Her revenge, and the revenge of her gang, more especially."

"Revenge! Gang!" repeated the detective, wonderingly.

Then he remembered that, since his companion's suspicions were not, according to his statement, fastened upon Janet, they were in all probability directed altogether outside the Borden household.

"That is just what I mean," growled Gunter, doggedly. "So, now is your mind satisfied on that knotty point?"

"Well, no, by no means," was the reply. "In the first place, I can't understand why you should have been attempting an interview with Janet, as you did the other night, unless you have fixed upon one of the sisters (if not Janet herself) as your 'master-key.'

"Oh, you can't, eh?"

"No; and in any case, I can't conceive of either one of those women having any connection with a criminal gang."

"It's a pity about you, Mr. Falconbridge. I am off this time, sure!" And the fellow again made a move to betake himself off.

But there had been a change of countenance, on his part, at the recurrence to his interview with Janet, which caused Falconbridge to detain him once more.

"Stop!" cried the latter: "you shall at least tell me why you are seeking the Scotch girl."

"No, I sha'n't!" and Gunter's face expressed positive fear for an instant. "Not at present, anyway!" with an oath.

"But when will you tell me?"

"I don't know. I'll think it over. In the mean time," with genuine frankness, if but for once in his contemptible life, "I'm dead broke, with nothing to eat in the cupboard at home; and a five dollar note would look as big to me as a roll of wall-paper."

The request had been anticipated, and the money was forthcoming.

"Still keep your eye on him, Tommy," Falconbridge instructed his assistant, a little later on; "but you needn't mind so much about Latham. He'll keep. In the mean time, we must map out some business for to-night, or my pledged word will be pushed to the wall."

Then he went to the Presbyterian Hospital, to chat with Borden.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAL BORDEN AND THE DETECTIVE.

HAL BORDEN was sitting up in bed, and was in unusually gay spirits, when the detective called.

This was especially encouraging when the latter learned that Susie had just gone away, after a private and exceptionally prolonged interview with her husband.

"Where have you been this age past?" cried Borden, dropping the illustrated journal he had been looking over, and extending his hand with much warmth. "I had begun to fear you had forgotten me, especially as Susie just told me of your failing to call at the cottage all yesterday."

He was vastly improved, and also expressed his pleasure over the prospect of a speedy transfer to his own home.

"This is splendid!" commented Falconbridge, after a few words of explanation of his seeming neglect. "Ah, my boy! that precious little wife of yours will soon have you on your sturdy pins again."

"Gad! I believe you, major. Do you know," after a slight pause, "things are beginning to clear and brighten, old fellow. I more than half-believe that I may have been a little hard on the little woman."

"Half-believe! and only a little hard!" echoed the detective. "Look here, Hal, you've been nothing short of brutal—pig-headedly brutal and unreasonable! Do you understand? And I'm going to make you acknowledge it on the spot."

To his continued satisfaction, Borden accepted the reproof quite good-naturedly.

"Go ahead, old man!" Hal rejoined, with a smile under his black mustache. "Only don't forget that I'm liable to kick under compulsory measures."

"What mule isn't? Now look here, you're probably in ignorance of the details of my detective work in your case, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Listen, then." And the detective forthwith gave the entire history of his connection with the case, to the minutest particular.

Needless to say that he was listened to with absorbing interest.

"It's simply a corker!" exclaimed the Express messenger, when all had been told.

"What is your first impression of it all?"

"I hardly know what, the mystery seems so complicated and baffling."

"At all events, you will now surely admit that both Susie and Fanny are let out of every suspicion?"

"Undoubtedly! That is," hesitatingly, "my wife is, unquestionably. And I've been simply a brute not to have seen it from the first."

Falconbridge grasped his hand.

"This is manful and splendid!" he exclaimed. "But let us analyze. Why not Fanny, too?"

"Oh!" hastily; "I wouldn't for a moment hint to the contrary. And yet—I simply can't accept that raw Scotch girl as the possible masquerader, and what other woman is left in the cottage for consideration? You see," reluctantly, "Fanny and I—there was once something between us. There!"

It should be mentioned that Falconbridge had preserved silence on three points in his history of the case, as just given to Borden. They were these: with regard to what he had overheard passing between Mrs. Borden and her lodger on the preceding Sunday night, and with regard to his newly-aroused suspicions as to the latter's "crooked" associations.

"I trust you will reserve nothing from me, Hal, that can have the remotest possible bearing upon our mystery," he now said, with unusual earnestness. "You ought to know me, moreover, as trustworthy with regard to the most delicate confidence."

"As a matter of course, old man. Well," after a reflective pause, "I paid court to Fanny Elmore before I changed over to Susie, if you must know it. And—and—don't think me a coxcomb for saying it—Fanny *may* have been treasuring it up against me in secret ever since. At all events, I am quite certain that she loved me passionately once; and—well, you can make your own deductions. You must know the old couplet about 'a woman scorned,' and 'love to hatred turned,' and all that sort of thing."

"Yes; but Fanny Elmore strikes me as an exceptionally self-contained and noble woman; one who would scarcely have remained as a member of your household, unless she had completely philosophized and eradicated the entire affair out of her heart and recollection."

"I've often thought so, too. But then; you're right as to your estimate of Fanny's character, major, especially as to the self-contained part. That fits her to a T. She is just the woman who, if disposed to treasure it up against me at all, would have done so without making a sign, and while hiding her revenge. Don't understand me as hinting of the possibility of her having actually personated Susie in this infernal affair; though I now see that she *could* have done so. I merely state—well, uncontrollable suggestions."

Falconbridge knitted his brows in profound thought.

"I may question you freely?" he finally asked.

"Absolutely."

"There was nothing dishonorable in your 'changing over' to the younger sister, as you have called it?"

"Bless you, no! Would Susie have had anything to do with me, do you think, if there had been? It was a mere discovery of incompatibility between Fanny and myself; the decision being arrived at with due deliberation. My making up to Susie was considerably of an after-thought, to which Fanny never made the slightest objection."

"Before that, Fanny and you had loved each other?"

"Passionately—too much so for it to last, perhaps. That is, we had thought we did, you know; and I hadn't known much of Susie, who was mostly away from home, with Philadelphia relatives."

"Remember, I am to ask what questions I choose."

"I am not repenting the privilege granted, old fellow."

"Was this incompatibility discovered by you before or after you came to know the younger sister better?"

"Rather after, I should say," with a slight flush.

"In what did the incompatibility seem chiefly to consist?"

"In our tempers."

"Ah!"

"Yes; I have not a very equable one on my own part, as you must know; while Fanny was more or less furiously jealous all the time."

"Oho!"

"She has changed altogether—that is, outwardly."

"I should say so! A more agreeably sensible woman, for one who is also so undeniably handsome, I don't know of anywhere. Well, we understand ourselves pretty thoroughly on the possibility in this direction."

"Yes; there is merely less unreasonableness in the possibility of Fanny having been my wife's impersonator in the wretched affair than Janet. That is all."

"I can hardly agree with you. Still, we'll let it go at that. My next question suggests itself out of what we have just been talking about, and I don't want you to be startled by it."

"Cut away!"

"Has Miss Elmore ever, in her antecedents, before or after you knew her, had any—er—associations with—er—unworthy or suspicious characters?"

Borden was startled by the question, so much so, indeed, that Falconbridge was sorry for the temerity that had inspired it; and for which his recent conversation with Gunter was directly responsible, as the reader who reads between the lines will readily enough perceive.

It was therefore no little surprise for the detective when these words came in reply, after a troubled pause:

"Yes; I am sorry to say she had. It was one of the Elmore closet skeletons."

"I know too much now not to know more, Borden."

"You shall have it all. Fanny and I are about of one age—nearly twenty-eight, while Susie is nearly five years younger. Long before I knew either of them, and when Fanny was about sixteen, she had her—her great trouble."

"Well?"

"She was engaged to be married to a young fellow who was a thief."

"A thief!"

"Yes, from abroad; and a veteran at that, I have been told, notwithstanding that he was but four or five years the girl's senior."

"All this happened in the western city where the Elmores lived before coming here."

"Well, the wedding was actually under way, when the rogue was dragged away to prison, his true character exposed; and he was subsequently sent up for a long term, though I have understood he afterward effected a daring escape, and permanently disappeared."

"Such a blow would have killed any less strong-minded girl than Fanny Elmore, I suppose. As it was, it killed her father, who was in feeble health at the time; and the mother died a year or two later, perhaps indirectly from the same cause."

"The girls were living with an aunt, since dead, in this city when I first made Fanny's acquaintance, say a little more than five years ago."

CHAPTER XX.

BORDEN CONCLUDES FANNY ELMORE'S HISTORY.

FALCONBRIDGE drew a long breath.

"A strange piece of family history, truly," he exclaimed. "And one that no one would dream of connecting such a woman as Miss Elmore with."

"You may well say that," said Borden.

"How she must have suffered! And now I think of it, her very beauty at present suggests the possibility of heart trouble and great suffering in the past."

"Like enough; for Fanny's good looks aren't of the ordinary sort."

"May I ask—"

"I feel your question coming, major, and will answer it in advance. It is simple justice to Fanny that the truth should be told. Yes, she did apprise me of every particular I have recounted to you when I was on the point of making my declaration."

"Noble woman!"

"As for myself, I didn't care. I was too much in love, or thought I was, for that. And then Fanny herself had outlived the emotional element of her misfortune, and was all I could desire in reciprocating my passion—a little more so, perhaps, for I have hinted at her jealousies."

There was another long pause, after which the detective said:

"That was all, then? This past association was merely her misfortune, of course; and there have been none others of a suspicious nature."

But Borden's response was none the less of a surprise than in the case of his initial question, which had evolved such an unexpected piece of family history.

"You're out there!" he exclaimed half irritably. "There have been others, or at least suggestions of them. Curse it all! that is our closet skeleton—Susie's and mine—and, though it hasn't rattled very demonstratively for a year or two past, it's none the less propped up in its dark corner, for all that."

The detective looked at him in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Simply that Fanny Elmore has a mystery of her own," with a troubled frown. "Not long after her coming to live with Susie and me, we discovered that she was keeping up some sort of mysterious appointments. We subsequently discovered them to be with both men and women (though never with men alone: there is that much in her favor) of undoubtedly bad or suspicious character, judging by appearances."

"This is astonishing!"

"Naturally, you think so. Who wouldn't? Taxed with what we had discovered, she would make no other explanation whatever, other than that her motives were satisfactory to her conscience, and she coldly offered to relieve us of her home society at any time that we should find her actions inconsistent with our ideas of propriety."

"Of course, we wouldn't hear of that—that is, Susie wouldn't, and there it has remained, as the one shadow in our home up to the time of this accursed mystery of the veiled woman in Susie's semblance!"

"However, as I have said, for the past year or two we have had nothing to complain of in Fanny's inexplicableness. If she has kept up her shady associations, she has been so secret about it as to baffle our curiosity completely."

"But Susie is of the opinion that she has forsaken them altogether. She as much as told me so to-day, when I alluded to the matter, after noticing that Fanny had not accompanied her as usual. Strange, too!"

"What is strange, Hal?"

"I was thinking of my friend, Frank Parsons, in this connection; though it is nothing more than an odd coincidence, after all."

"Pray explain, my dear fellow."

"Well, Frank has been our lodger now for about eighteen months. Strange as it may seem, and Susie and I have often thought of it, Fanny's reformation, as you might call it, dates from the time of Frank taking up his quarters with us. In fact, we felt pretty certain it would prove a match sooner or later, as Parsons was very attentive at first, and they were together a great deal. However, it never came to anything. They gradually cooled off into being good friends, and nothing more."

"An odd fish is Frank Parsons! By Jove!" with a laugh: "I might more reasonably suspect him of a tenderness for Susie herself, perhaps, than for Fanny nowadays. Of course, I'm only joking, you know."

A tremendous revelation, or rather possibility, had suddenly presented itself to Falconbridge.

"I was intending to speak with you of Parsons in a general way to-day," he said, with no trace in his manner of what was passing in his thoughts. "But first tell me this. At whose suggestion was it that he first came to lodge with you?"

"Why, strangely enough, at Fanny's."

"Yet he was originally your acquaintance, not hers?"

"Yes; that is, we had been boys together at school here in New York, and were chums until Frank was, say, sixteen, and I several years less. Then Frank had gone abroad, and we did not meet again till a couple of years ago. I was only an Express messenger, while Frank had received his education as a civil engineer, and was also a man of means."

"But, bless you, he's the best fellow in the world! The difference in our worldly positions went for just nothing with him. He even seemed to want to renew our old chumming relations all the more for it—and that, too, without any patronizing air, as you must have seen."

"Yes; a most agreeable and democratic sort of fellow."

"You bet! They don't make any better." And Hal, who was never weary of singing Parsons's praises, went on with panegyrics in a similar strain.

"By the way," presently interposed the detective, "you had heard nothing of each other between boyhood and your reunion, then?"

"Nothing whatever."

"How did he chance to find you out?"

"Why, oddly enough, that was through my sister-in-law, too."

"Oho!"

"Yes. He had done her some courtesy in a crowded elevated car, it seemed, and, in the few exchanges of words that ensued, my name happened to be mentioned. That was the way of it."

"Ah, I see."

"That was enough, you know, for Frank to renew relations with me in short order."

"Then one evening, when he had become quite familiar with us all, he alluded to his intention of settling down permanently in New York. Thereupon Fanny laughingly asked why Mr. Parsons shouldn't become the occupant of our spare room, if not too humble for his tastes. Frank took to the notion at once, Susie made no objections, it seemed just the thing with me for the girls to have such a good fellow in the house when I was necessarily so much from home, and he has been with us ever since. Now, you've got it in a nutshell."

They maintained a thoughtful silence, at the end of which he said:

"Hal, I want to question you as freely about Frank Parsons as you permitted me to do with regard to Miss Elmore."

"Gad, old fellow! I rather think you have been doing it already."

"But I mean in the same privileged, or let us say professional, way."

"At your service, major. But you'll find no flies on Frank Parsons, let me tell you that at the outset. Just the best, dearest, kindest—"

"Yes, yes; I've no doubt as to all that. Let me first ask you, then, if you know anything of his career since he was your boyhood's friend."

"Only what he has chosen to tell."

"How much is that?"

"Well, not a great-deal, come to think of it," reflectively. "You see, Frank thinks so much of others that he doesn't care to talk much about himself. I suppose that's the explanation of it. There's no more self-sacrificing, impulsive chap in the world than Frank!"

"Of course, but uncommunicative as to himself, for all that, eh?"

"Yes; that's about the size of it."

"Did you know anything of his family when at school with him?"

"No; only that he was an adopted son of some old fellow, from whom, I have understood, he inherited his present income."

"And you know little or nothing of him while he was abroad?"

"Only that he studied civil engineering, or something of the sort—I believe he calls himself an engineering draughtsman—while in Heidelberg, or some such place. But he seems to have always moved in nobby society. You can see that for yourself."

"To be sure! But did you ever see any specimens of his draughtsmanship?"

"I believe not. You see, Frank doubtless never liked his profession; or, at all events, he seems to dislike any allusion to it. Still, he ought to have had success at it if he wished, judging by his penmanship."

"A pretty good penman, eh?"

"Good? He's a stunner! His pothooks and hangers are like copper-plate script. And clever? Why, he can imitate any man's handwriting to perfection, almost at a glance!"

"Indeed!"

"You ought to see it! It seems a regular gift with him."

"No doubt. Don't be angry now when I ask you if you have ever thought him—perhaps only in an adventurous or experimental way, you know—capable of associating with fellows beneath him—fellows that other folks somewhat more fastidious might regard as suspicious or crooked characters, you know?"

Borden stared.

"No, of course not," he replied.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. BORDEN'S LODGER FURTHER INVESTIGATED.

THEN Hal Borden, who had seemed put out at the detective's implied aspersion of his favorite friend's character, went on:

"I never heard of such a thing! Why do you ask me such a question with regard to Frank?"

The detective deliberated before replying.

It would never do to go into particulars, if the suspicions that had arisen were to be kept away from Parson's own ears, in view of the ingenuous and gushing nature of Borden's admiration for his friend.

"Oh, don't take it too seriously," Falconbridge at last replied, indifferently. "I merely saw him in seemingly earnest conversation this morning with a well-known crook."

And he went on with a superficial mention of what he had seen, adding:

"Of course, I attached no real importance to the circumstance, though I made up my mind to speak of it to you. Who knows but Frank may have been robbed, and is seeking to recover his property by a little private detective work on his own account, you know? Now I think of it, he was without his watch when last I saw him."

But Borden was troubled in a way that did not seem to yield to this assumption of indifference.

"That is nothing. He had left his watch for repairs, as he told me," was the young man's response.

Then he struck the side of the couch with his fist, his brow blackening.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered; "if I thought that, I would give her a piece of my mind."

The detective pretended to be startled a little.

"If you thought what, Hal?" he demanded.

"Be frank with me."

"Certainly. It's just this, major: I connect Fanny with this affair."

"Fanny!"

"Yes; that's the only way to account for it. She has returned to her habit of mysterious appointments, and the like, and has no doubt taken Frank into her confidence. He would never be seen talking to such a notorious person as you describe, on his own account. Never!"

"Oh, come!" with a laugh; "even Frank is not quite a saint. You know it is quite the fad among you gentlemen nowadays to go 'slumming,' as they call it. They do it in London, and, of course, must do it here."

But Borden was not satisfied.

"It won't do," he continued, moodily. "Frank wouldn't take up such a perilous fad. He is the soul of fastidiousness, no less than of honor. Fanny," shaking his head, "is in some way at the bottom of it."

"But I wouldn't mention it to either of them, if I were you."

"I sha'n't, on second thoughts. Besides," brightening up, "I'll soon be back in my own home now, and then it can't be long before I'm thoroughly on my legs once more. Then," laughing, "let all the mysteries look out!"

Falconbridge welcomed the opportunity of changing the subject into a less serious vein, and soon after that took his departure.

With regard to the master-mystery, as it may be called, his suspicions were now redirected to Fanny Elmore, without any perceptible weakening as to those he had already fostered with regard to Janet Douglas.

"In spite of that rascal, Jake Gunter's pretensions to the contrary," he thought, "it must lie between those two. Moreover, in view of these strange disclosures with regard to Miss Elmore, she is just the one to have awakened the fellow's apprehensions as to a prospective revenge at her hands, or instigation. Well, the garter-clasp ought to decide, if I ever have the opportunity to apply the test."

In the mean time, it now being well along in the afternoon, he had been mechanically directing his steps with the Borden cottage as his next objective point.

Reaching and entering it, without ringing, as had now become his custom, he was surprised by hearing voices in the rooms above.

It was, indeed, a day for surprises and disclosures. The voices, which were pitched in a high key, were those of the sisters, and, almost before the intruder below was well aware of it, he was the overhearer of an unexpected quarrel between them.

"The idea!" Fanny was heard to exclaim, indignantly. "Aud you a married woman, too, with a husband so situated, unfortunately, as to be unable to look after his domestic interests!"

"Look you, Fanny!" Susie's voice replied, more moderately, but with a highly provoked ring in it, "don't you dare to cast such a reflection upon my honor again or—or you are no longer a sister of mine. Don't forget it!"

"I don't care!" half-sobbingly. "You would rob me of Frank's love just as you once robbed me of Hal Borden's!"

"It is false—shamefully, unwomanly false! As to your last aspersion, with regard to my husband, I shall make no reply—I wouldn't stoop to do it. But your hint with regard to my caring the snap of my finger for Mr. Parsons is—is just too beastly mean of you, Fanny Elmore! I just hate the man, if you must have the truth!"

"I—I don't believe it! He—he seemed to think everything of me at first, be-before he took to admiring you."

"Indeed! Just let him dare to admire me, that is all! I'd tell Hal without a moment's hesitation—that is, when Hal got well enough to punish the fellow's insolence as it should deserve!"

"I don't believe it! Meek as you pretend to be, I believe you are fond of all men's admiration."

"What woman is not in the abstract? But—here, don't you continue that aspersion, miss! I will have no man's admiration but my husband's. You've got to understand this distinctly, once for all!"

"Catch me understanding that!"

"Look here, then," as if stung to the quick, "I am going to open your eyes for you. Frank Parsons has been notified by me to give up his room when his month is up. You understand? And he'll stop not on the order of his going then, but go at once, or my name is not Susan Borden!"

"Frank—to-go?" There was a sort of terrified surprise in the words.

"Yes; and would you know the reason why?"

"Yes."

"It is because the self-conceited, unprincipled scoundrel undertook to address me as no true gentleman would address a married woman! That is the reason. It was down-stairs Sunday night just before you came home from church with Janet."

"You are not exaggerating, Susie?"

"I'd be likely to on such a subject, wouldn't I? The fellow won't be apt to forget that interview in a hurry. It was only at last, after he had whined for forgiveness like a whipped cur, that I consented to say nothing to my husband, on the sole condition of his quitting my house instantly. Then I agreed to let him stay on till the month's end, but I only did that to save appearances. But I never promised not tell you—you have wrung it from me in my sheer self-defense—and you can take the disclosure to Hal, or do what you like with it."

"Forgive me, Sue! Oh, to think of my having been so foolish, so mad!"

The detective stayed for no more.

It was dusk, with the public lamps not yet lighted, as he turned into Lexington avenue, a rather unfrequented street in this quarter and at this hour, a few minutes later.

Then he just had time to avoid observation, as he perceived Janet Douglas withdrawn in the shadow of a storage warehouse doorway, where she was in close conversation with a man who was certainly neither her lover, Jim Latham, nor Frank Parsons, who might be supposed to be still keeping her under espionage, nor Jake Gunter, either, for that matter—a big, burly, suspicious-looking man, muffled to the eyes.

"Oho!" thought Falconbridge, slipping into a place of observation behind a convenient pile of building material. "So even raw Janet can even have her suspicious associations, too, it would seem! Well it's neck and neck between Miss Fanny and her now, to a dead ce tainty. Oh, if this garter clasp in my possession could speak!"

Here Janet separated from her strange companion, he going South and she North, to turn the home corner.

The detective stepped out from his place of concealment, so as to confront her unexpectedly.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

"GOOD-EVENING, my dear!" was the detective's paternal greeting to the young girl. "How is your mistress and her sister, pray?"

Janet had started back in confusion and dismay. Then, without answering, she boldly grasped the detective's arm, with a vehemence that left him in no doubt as to her muscularity, her grasp being not unlike that of a jack-screw at high pressure.

"Sae it's yourself, Maister Fockenbrigg, is it?" she demanded, in her fearless way. "Look ye, sir! war you spryin' on me?"

"Spryin' on you, Janet! what does that mean?"

"Dinna ye purtend ignorance, Maister Fockenbrigg!" she cried, angrily. "But look ye, sir. If I am but a puir lass, and you're my betters, I know my richts in free Ameriky. And, if I thocht ye war a-spryin' me, I'd mak sae bold as to gie ye a taste o' the pith o' my gude richt arm, sir! Sae, there noo!"

And then, with a half-laugh at the detective's unaffected astonishment, she flitted away.

He remarked the free and floating character of her walk that Fanny Elmore had once mentioned to him, and it even struck him, as she disappeared around the corner, that there was a suggestion of that peculiarity in it which was noticeable in the mysterious veiled woman of whom he was in such ardent quest.

A low, bantering laugh caused him to turn.

It was from no less a personage than Mr. Frank Parsons, who was just stepping from behind the same pile of building material which had furnished the detective with his momentary place of concealment.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Falconbridge.

"Hallo!" echoed the other.

Then they both burst out laughing and shook hands.

It was evident that they had both been keeping Janet under watch from almost the same point of observation, without being aware of each other's proximity, which intensified the comicalness of the incident.

"War is to be declared at last, I suppose," cried Parsons, "and hereafter it is to be professional versus amateur with a vengeance!"

"Not so bad as that, I hope," replied the detective in kind. "Do you occasionally smile nippingly at about this hour?"

"Invariably, on congenial invitation." And they walked away together.

It was the first time Falconbridge had met Parsons since his suspicions had been aroused as to the latter's possible shadiness of character; but, notwithstanding his certain knowledge of the young man's unprincipledness with regard to women, *et al.*, he could not but feel a lingering liking for him.

"Look here, major," Frank said, with his candid abruptness, after a brief pause, "I'd have you understand one thing."

"What is it, Frank?"

"Just this, my dear fellow: That, if I am amateuring in this infernal mystery case—and it would be worse than useless to deny it now—it's chiefly in your interest."

"In my interest!"

"Fact, I assure you! believe it or not, as you choose."

"But pray explain, Frank."

"That's easily done. Of course, on general principles, I want to see this thing fathomed mainly, perhaps, on my friend, Hal Borden's account; but for all that, I hope you don't think," with a laugh, "that I am seeking either honor or profit in the thing."

"Of course, I don't, since you seem to assure me to the contrary," replied the detective, genially. "But amateuring in my business is a queer fascination. I've known it to turn the head of many a good fellow."

"You'll find me an exception to the rule, my friend. I am interested in this thing as an excitement. Of course, I shall give nothing away before ripe, but my sole intention all along has been to quietly let you in for whatever I might chance to discover."

"This is really good of you, Frank; but here we are!" And Falconbridge led the way into a saloon.

"Don't say it's good of me," nonchalantly continued Parsons over the glasses. "I get my excitement, which I am selfish enough in desiring; though I am really in hopes of springing a pleasant surprise upon you in a day or two."

"Frank," abruptly, but after due deliberation, "how do you chance to be on chatting terms with such a notorious crook as Preacher Walsh?"

Parsons burst out laughing, without so much as the surprised quiver of an eyelid.

"Ab, you old Argus, you!" he exclaimed, slapping his companion on the shoulder. "Instead of the falcon, they should call you the lynx-eyed, detective. Found out at last, am I?"

Falconbridge laughed, too, and merely mentioned the fact of having seen the men together in Bleeker street.

"Of course, it's none of my business," he added. "But I couldn't help dropping you a friendly caution, you know."

"Thanks all the same, old fellow, though I rather flatter myself on having cut my ye-teeth. You've doubtless heard of the slumming sights that are nowadays so much the go, eh?"

"To be sure!"

"Well, on one of those expeditions, with a party of young fellows not long ago, I met his Reverence, the Preacher, and also became interested in a young thing—a sort of dove in a buzzard's roost. You understand?"

"Like enough."

"Well, that's about the size of it. I'm on the humanitarian lay, at least for once in my life, and his Reverence is keeping track of the affair for me. I may give you the particulars at a later day."

"Frank, my boy, you seem to be a better fel-low than even I have had any idea of."

And then they separated, though it might have enlightened the detective yet further to have seen the look that Mr. Frank Parsons threw after him just as soon as his back was turned.

"Parsons is less deep than sharp," thought Falconbridge, when alone. "Otherwise, he would have surmised my making inquiries of the crook at the first opportunity."

"Mr. Falconbridge may be a king-falcon, but I am not his pigeon," was Parsons's private reflection, while betaking himself in the opposite direction. "But all things come to him that waits—and acts."

The detective, on his part, had not proceeded far before he found Tommy Dodd, Tommy, the ubiquitous and indefatigable, he might be called.

"Where did Gunter finally bring up?" was the first question.

"Outside a fashionable dressmaker's on Sixth avenue," was the reply.

"What attracted him there?"

"Miss Fanny Elmore."

"Oho!"

"He followed the lady along Forty-second street to shop an hour ago, and was watching like a cat from the opposite side of the street, until she should come out of it, when I thought it about time to look you up again, boss. Have had you in sight since you quitted the hospital."

"Tommy, you're a trump! You shall come with me for a bang up oyster supper."

Tommy brightened all over.

"You bid me to the festive board, my liege?"

he exclaimed. "'Tis well; for here, with jocund dance and merry minstrelsy, come on the villagers!"

"Drop on that, or the invitation may be canceled. There's work for us to-night, I hope—work that may altogether hinge upon an apparently trivial little article in my possession."

"May I ask what the article is, boss?" Tommy ventured to inquire, with a look of devouing curiosity.

"You may, and receive the answer, my lad, on one condition."

"The condition, my lord—give it a name."

"That you religiously abstain from any subsequent question."

"My liege, you have my plighted word!"

"You won't forgot?"

"Not while memory holds her seat in this distractred—"

"That on which so much will probably hinge is—a lady's garter-clasp!"

Master Dodd gave a sort of frantic little gasp, and then, with his accustomed grin, which told of self-conquest at the expense of a curiosity in chains, he followed his chuckling principal into a handsome restaurant.

"My sovereign liege," smilingly observed the youth, a little later, from the midst of his second course of the bivalvulous refreshment, "feed me but upon this *entree* of the Olympian menu, and I'm yours till the crack o' doom!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DOUBLE WATCH.

At eleven o'clock of the forthcoming night, the Falcon Detective and his assistant found themselves still on the secret watch of the Borden cottage, where they had taken up their post at a comparatively early hour in the evening, without anything as yet having occurred worthy of notice.

Miss Fanny had come out and then returned, after a brief errand around the avenue corner, in her ordinary street dress, and without any facial concealment whatever.

Then Mrs. Borden, even more prosaic, had gone off to the meat-market, bringing back a well-filled basket.

Later on, Janet had stealthily appeared at the garden gate, looking wistfully up and down the street, probably for Jim Latham or the strange man with whom she had been in conversation when 'spied on' in the afternoon, but only to finally retire with a disappointed air, after which she was seen no more.

Then Parsons, the lodger, had come out, cigar in mouth, but to return shortly, after what seemed nothing more important than a before-bedtime stroll.

After this the lights had disappeared, one by one, until finally the entire house was apparently buried in repose.

Still, neither of the watchers was impatient, as it was yet hardly time for the mysterious fugitive to make her appearance, if she was to do so at all.

The night was uncommonly dark, with only the flickering street-lamps to relieve it, and the neighborhood was correspondingly lonely and deserted.

"I wish I had brought my pocket dark-lantern, boss," whispered Tommy, buttoning up his little overcoat more tightly under the chin. "If you'd happen to put me on the shadowing lay, I don't know what I'd do without it."

"You are simply to remain in concealment here," was the reply. "If there's any shadowing to be done, I'll attend to it."

"But you haven't brought your bull's-eye either, boss, and—Oh, by my halidome! I had forgotten your electric sparkler."

Falconbridge had touched a small electric attachment in his overcoat-pocket, which caused a unique breastpin, in the design of a tiny lantern, in the middle of his shirt-front, which was purposely exposed, to suddenly blaze out with a white, wonderful luster, which illuminated a goodly space of his surroundings with a sharp, clear-cut brightness, almost as of the sun at mid-day.

Another touch, and it was gone, as instantaneously as it had appeared.

"Yes," he said. "I only succeeded in having my little glow-worm put in order by this morning. If I'd had it with me heretofore, I might have come off more creditably than I have done."

Here there was a cautioning touch of the boy's hand.

A man was cautiously approaching the house from the west.

As he came to a pause partly under the street-lamp, Falconbridge was certain that it was the stranger with whom he had perceived Janet conversing in the afternoon.

An awkward-looking and very large, gaunt man, now as then wearing a coarse frieze great-coat, in whose huge upright collar, combined with the brim of his slouched hat, his face and head were buried almost completely from view.

He stood for a moment, looking the cottage-front over in an irresolute way, and then, after some hesitation, he turned and began retracing his steps.

"Remember!" whispered the detective to his

little assistant; "you're simply to remain in concealment and watch."

Tommy silently nodded, and then Falconbridge was upon the stranger's track, swift as the wind, light-footed as the wolf.

But almost soundless as were his steps, they were heard by the man, who, after one apparently terrified look thrown back over his shoulder, suddenly bounded away, like a startled stag, with the hound at its heels.

Westward they sped, then up around the Park avenue corner, and on northward, with no perceptible gain one way or the other at first.

But, after three blocks had been covered, the trained running powers of the detective began to assert their supremacy.

"Stop!" he called out, when within a dozen yards or so of the fugitive; "if you're an honest man, you've nothing to fear."

The other suddenly wheeled in his tracks, in a frenzy of fright or fury, it was difficult to tell which.

"Awa' wi' ye, ye robber!" he roared, in the broadest of Gaelic dialects. "By Saint Andrew! I hae that wi' which I can fend me agang the hull toon full o' footpads, a' ween!"

With that, and before the detective could check his conquering rush, or cry out a second disclaimer of violent intent, the fellow tore open his great coat, and whipped out from somewhere amid its spacious interior an enormous claymore, or two-handed broadsword, which looked less formidable than the avenging sword of the archangel itself as he caused it to describe sweeping circles over his head.

"A wa' wi' ye, a' say!" shouted the man again. "It war ma feyther's feyther's sword on Culloden's gory fiel, an' there's pith to wield it ava' in Donald's twa guude arms yet!"

And, even while flinging out his grotesque defiance, he aimed a tremendous blow that would surely have lopped off his pursuer's head sheer at the shoulder-line, but for a fortunate backward leap, which, combined with the influence of a deadly banana-peel underfoot, at that critical juncture threw the detective flat on his back, just in time to avoid the full sweep of the murderous blade, which cut through the air with a sharp whistling sound, ominously suggestive of a meat-ax in its descent upon a fore-quarter of beef.

"Good Lord, man! what are you up to?" the detective managed to exclaim while still prostrate, though struggling to regain his feet, for the fall had been a severe one. "I'm no robber, and am not bent on doing you harm."

But he merely caught a glimpse of the hesitatingly lowered blade, then of a broad, red-whiskered Scotch face, still goggled-eyed and luminous with what might have been the concentrated bottle-fire of half the Highland clans north of the Grampian Hills; and when at last he staggered to his feet, momentarily faint and dazzled from his tumble, the doughty possessor of the sanguinary heirloom from Culloden's field had vanished into space.

Some compensation for his hard luck was in store for him on his return to Tommy's side.

"There's nuts, boss!" whispered the boy, with his champion grin.

"What is it?"

"The mysterious gal!"

"What of her?"

"She slipped out of the cottage before you could have got away fifty paces after that hulking galoot."

"You are sure?"

"Dead to rights! I could have sworn it was Mrs. Borden herself."

"Which way did she take?"

"Straight up the street—west, as before when you took after her."

The detective's first sensation was one of disappointment, but when he remembered what a poor figure he had cut in his preceding attempts to run the will-o'-the-wisp fugitive down, he was not sorry to have been beyond the temptation to repeat the attempt.

"Let us but wait," he said, in a low voice. "If she but returns, and enters the house again, her identification should be at my mercy."

"I feel sure she'll come back," whispered the boy, confidently.

"Why do you feel so sure?"

"Well, boss, the woman had that sort of a way with her."

"What was her manner?"

"Stealthy and watchful at first; and then, after looking at the hang of her togs under the lamp yonder, away she sailed, like a steamboat excursion."

They accordingly waited, and, as they did so, a neighboring church clock tolled out the midnight.

What puzzled the detective at this juncture was that Frank Parsons should not now be on the watch, on his own account.

If the young man was really so certain that Janet Douglas was the culprit, why should he miss the present opportunity to prove the correctness of his hypothesis? However, he might have succumbed to sleep, or have postponed the test, and Falconbridge was just now the last person to quarrel with a remissness that was leaving the field so clear for his own exclusive efforts.

"Hist!" whispered Tommy Dodd excitedly at last. "There she comes."

Sure enough, the mysterious woman was returning.

She came at a very brisk pace, almost at a run, flashed under the street-lamp, through the gate, and then the cottage door had opened and closed on her.

The detective felt a great, exultant leap of the heart.

But he had hardly started in pursuit when the boy's hand was once more laid on his arm with a warning touch.

"Not yet, boss!" whispered Tommy. "Look!"

A man, who had evidently been in pursuit of the woman, was running up, with scarcely a sound to his hurrying steps, but with loud, wheezing pantings for breath.

"It is Gunter!" was Falconbridge's whispered reply. "Curse him! he may jingle the door-bell, and spoil all. He must be choked off at all hazards!"

With that, he glided across the street, and so ordered his interception as to suddenly come into violent collision with the ex-brakeman.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GARTER-CLASP.

GUNTER reeled back, with a furious exclamation, but was instantly whirled to the earth, and gripped by the throat.

"What do you want?" he gasped, with a string of oaths. "Who are you?"

For answer, the detective pressed his pocket electric attachment with his disengaged hand.

The breast-pin blazed, instantly flooding the forms of both men, vanquished and vanquisher, with its clear sun-like radiance.

Gunter gave a sort of snort of astonishment and rage.

"I say, let go my gullet, maje!" he managed to articulate.

"Not much; you'll raise an alarm, and that might spoil everything."

"No, by Jupiter!" with another oath.

"I'll not trust you."

"Take me as partner, then, and we'll nab the woman together."

"I prefer a lone hand in this game."

"You're sure to make a missfire without me. I'll swear it, boss! You only imagine, I know!"

"No use!"

Here Gunter attempted to make an outcry, but was promptly silenced by a tightening of the grip on his windpipe, after which the detective signaled to Tommy Dodd.

"What is it, boss?" whispered the little fellow, prompt to respond, and fairly dancing in his delight at the adventure. "Shall I sit on his mouth?"

"No." And Falconbridge pointed to a heavy silk muffler about the fallen man's neck.

The boy greedily took the hint, and a moment later Mr. Gunter was securely gagged with his own muffler.

Then he was bound hand and foot with a stout cord, which the detective took out of his pocket, after which he was deposited out of harm's way in a neighboring area.

Signaling Tommy to resume his post, Falconbridge, who had once more extinguished his breast-pin illuminator, silently entered the Borden cottage, without further interruption.

A great exultation filled his breast. He felt that, now or never, the decisive moment was at hand; and a devouring curiosity, no less than a sterner and more practical feeling, took possession of him.

Whom was he to identify as the infamous and heretofore singularly successful personator of Susie Borden in that crime which had so nearly cost the Express messenger his life, together with the loss of the ten thousand dollar package?

Was it to be Janet Douglas or Fanny Elmore, whom the talisman test of the garter-clasp, so to speak, was to brand as the culprit, and place in his iron hands?

That was the question!

But these conflicting sensations did not prevent him from proceeding with the utmost method and system.

His first step was to turn on the light from his extraordinary little breastpin, and to examine carefully every room, nook and cranny of the lower floor.

This was done in silence and with thoroughness.

Not a soul was in hiding on the ground floor, and every place of egress, door and window, was found to be thoroughly secured.

The cellar was next searched, with similar results; and he at last stood at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the second floor, with a consciousness that his real task, was still before him.

Below those stairs, the examination had been merely precautionary.

He knew the house thoroughly.

The second-floor front was the large room which had been fitted up recently for Borden's reception when he should come out of the hospital. It might be still occupied by the sisters, or they might have transferred their quarters to the smaller communicating room next back of it, which, before the misfortune to Hal, had

been Miss Fanny Elmore's exclusive occupancy. This would have to be determined, as delicately as might be, but with an unmistakableness that must admit of no hesitation.

Then at the side of the large or best room there was the spacious front hall bedroom, which was occupied by Frank Parsons, at a rental of twelve dollars a month. And what would otherwise have been the rear hall bed-chamber had been converted into a bath-room.

This arrangement comprised the entire second floor.

The stairs, however, were continued up yet another but narrower flight, entered from a hallway space directly before the doors opening into both Parsons's and the best rooms, which led up to an attic room occupied by Janet, the servant.

The detective had never been up in the attic, but had been given to understand that it was one great room occupying the entire loft; and he knew from observation that it was without dormer windows, by which a fugitive might have reached the roof from within, the light being admitted by a narrow window at the side, so high up in the peak of the roof as to altogether preclude the possibility of its use by a secret operator as a means of egress or ingress.

So now at last, with his foot upon the stairs leading up above the first or ground floor of the cottage, the Falcon Detective may surely be pardoned for quietly indulging in the self-satisfied reflection that he had the secret of the mysterious feminine criminal's identity fairly in a trap, as it were, from which there seemed not the possibility of an escape or evasion.

He had cornered the mystery; the enigma was at his disposal.

In this frame of mind he ascended the steps, without a sound, amid the wreath of electric brightness that was as a part of him.

The upper part of the house was wrapped in as complete silence as that below, with, however, the additional suggestion of breathing repose which somehow makes itself apparent to the sensitive intruder upon a place in which healthful sleep is regnant, like a spiritual rustling amid the material bushes of nature, or the soft murmur of visible sea-waves upon a moonlight beach that are yet beyond the sense of physical hearing.

The bath-room was first entered, and found to contain no lurker.

Then the detective paused with his ear at the door of the larger rear room, and, listening intently, presently satisfied himself of the faint sounds of companion breathings within.

He inwardly rejoiced, with the thankfulness of a true man, at this discovery. For if this room was occupied by the sisters, as it evidently was, and, as he profoundly hoped, it should prove that before retiring they had made a convenience of the larger communicating room to undress in, their discarded garments were more likely to have been left there, and he would thus avoid the necessity (little less than a sacrilege did he regard it) of intruding upon the privacy of their slumber.

Slumber! He again paused at the door of the larger adjoining room, filled with the momentousness of the discovery which he believed he was about to make.

Slumber? Of course, amid that common atmosphere, that houseful, of innocent repose, there was one who must be feigning, or who could not yet have had time to compose herself to the oblivion of sleep, after having disposed of the habiliments of her iniquitous masquerade.

Which?

He noiselessly opened the door, and entered.

It was as he had hoped.

The clothes of the ladies had been left in this room previous to their retirement into the adjoining apartment, the communicating door of which was half ajar.

The detective held in his hand the odd garter-clasp, the discovery of whose mate was to tell the tale of guilt for the owner of whatsoever apparel it belonged to.

The young women had undressed on opposite sides of the room, their skirts and waists being suspended from convenient hooks in the wall, their shoes and stockings lying on the floor beside the respective chairs which had been used in taking them off.

The first of the collections which the detective examined, with an instinctive and shrinking delicacy that was a credit to his manhood, he at once recognized as the belongings of Hal Borden's wife; and the pair of garters lying with the stockings, which were white, bore clasps of the pattern that Parsons had indicated, before the jeweler's show-window, as the gift of the lady's husband.

He crossed the room reluctantly, and then, as his associative illumination fell brightly upon the belongings of the elder sister, he experienced a shock of poignant dismay. He had hoped even against hope that not upon handsome Fanny Elmore's head would alight the damning proof of guilt, as evidenced by the tell-tale garter-clasp.

Yet here, before his eyes, was that very testimony!

CHAPTER XXV.

WHICH?

MISS ELMORE's black silk stockings (she seemed more fastidious in her underwear than her sister) were neatly folded away on top of her pretty garter boots.

On top of the stockings lay a pair of handsome, broad-banded, black-red-and-gold striped elastic garters.

On one of these the original clasp was missing, its place being supplied by an ordinary steel buckle.

On the other was a highly ornamental clasp formed of two hearts, linked by a central star, all of gold, prettily chased, but devoid of initial or monogram, with a soft golden fringe falling from the inner edge of the several parts.

Mechanically, the detective picked up this garter, and compared it with the one already in his hand; scrutinizing them wildly in the hope that they might present at last some slight points of difference.

Vain hope!

They were exact mates.

Keeping both articles in his grasp, he turned irresolutely toward the communicating door, through which there came to him softly the indubitably reposeful breathings of the two sleepers within.

Guilty! and yet she could already sleep, so hard upon her last deceitful masquerading in the deeply wronged Susie's semblance!

A sudden profound resentment took possession of Falconbridge.

Silently, but resolutely, he advanced to the door.

Why shoud he hesitate with such a base hypocrite and would-have-been murderer unmasked before him, even in her unconscionable slumber?

Still his hand fell but lightly upon the partly open door, though his intention had been to give a rude summons, a loud knock, and then proclaim the truth of his discovery through the barrier in a loud and remorseless voice.

But this he could not yet do, and his touch, light as it was, pushed the door silently inward, so that the face of the sleeper on the outer side of the broad, snowily-draperied couch within was for the instant fully exposed, without its owner being awakened, to the white, crystal light streaming from the involuntary intruder's person.

It was Fanny Elmore's face.

For an instant a fierce revolution seemed going on in the gazing detective's breast.

Then, after one parting glance at that sleeping face—so absolutely noble and sinless in womanly purity and beauty—he let the door swing back, once more hiding it from view; and crushing the trinkets into his pocket, he glided out of the room, as out of a mutely indignant angel's presence, with a feeling of self-reproach and self-contempt.

Once apart from those two rooms, with the hall-door once more closed between, he wiped his brow, which was streaming with perspiration.

"I can't do it, by Heaven!" he inwardly ejaculated, with a stronger oath than the one here given. "Proof or no proof, the owner of that slumbering face is pure and innocent before God!"

Then, with a sort of exasperated feeling, he went straight up the remaining staircase into the attic room, without exactly knowing why he did so.

But here a fresh and yet more baffling sensation awaited him.

Janet occupied a couch at the further extremity of the great loft, the outlines of which, together with those of its inmate's motionless and recumbent form, were indistinctly visible from the head of the stairs, where the searcher had come to a pause.

But close at hand, within his arm's-length, in fact, and under the full blaze of his accompanying luster, were collected the girl's coarse discarded garments.

He perceived them with a curious start, and then his eyes became riveted upon the thick shoes and cheap stockings beside the one chair that the cheerless, scantily-furnished, barn-like room seemed to contain.

Huddled with the stockings were a pair of garters, whose elastic bands were of cheap-looking yellow-and-red striped material, but the clasp on one of which had arrested his attention.

The next instant he had snatched it from the floor.

He was dumfounded.

This clasp, too, was a perfect mate to the one that had been in his possession.

The girl's remaining garter, which had been left untouched, was, as in the case of Miss Elmore's incomplete one, supplied with a common buckle, as a substitute for the missing companion clasp, though with a ruder one than in the other instance.

Bewildered, the detective produced again the original clasp, and the garter with its clasp attached, from the pocket in which he had thrust them.

There the three lay in his hand, side by side—a pair and an odd one, or rather two odd ones

and his original detached clasp—all of gold, of like design, without a particle of variance.

What could it mean?

Silently he crossed the floor, and looked down upon the sleeping lass.

She too looked innocent, guiltless, in her slumber, incapable of crime; though not so nobly and refinedly as in the case of Miss Elmore.

But what of all this?

Had he not read somewhere of a strange fact noted in the faces of the depraved inmates of St. Salpetrie and St. Lazare, the notorious female prisons of Paris, that, in slumber, they all wore, with but few exceptions, a strange stamp of sinlessness, as if the ghosts of their childhood's innocence were peering out through the hardened lineaments to soften and spiritualize them, thus presenting a psychological paradox?

Should he now withhold his arresting hand, with the proofs of guilt before his eyes, from alighting heavily and deservedly upon the culprit, and all for a cheating phantasm born of the sorcerous censer-smoke of sleep?

No!

And yet, stay—upon which?

There were not two fugitive criminals, only one, though both Fanny Elmore, the refined woman, and Janet Douglas, the ignorant Scottish lass, equally filled the bill of identification in the light of this voiceless testimony.

Which?

Appalled, no less than bewildered by the unparalleled decision demanded of him, he retraced his steps, and did not pause till once more at the foot of the attic stairs.

Here he made a mechanical stop, and strove to reason with himself.

His quandary became a species of mental and moral torture.

Even the reposeful silence of the house seemed to mock him; for was it not a silence which he ought to disturb, and yet dared not?

It was, however, suddenly disturbed in a manner he was little expecting.

There came a sudden crash below, as if the door were being violently burst in, and instantly silence and repose gave place to confusion and alarm.

There was no doubt about it.

The door had been burst in.

Amid the hubbub of frightened cries from the neighboring rooms, Falconbridge sprung to the head of the stairs.

He was confronted by Jake Gunter, rushing up the steps, three at a jump, with a face like a fiend's, in his hand a long, murderous-looking knife.

"Curse your treacherous soul, Jack Falconbridge!" he cried, in a hoarse, gasping way, as if not yet free from the gagging effects he had experienced. "You would play it as a lone hand, would you? But I'll balk your coward game, if it takes your life to do it!"

"Back!" exclaimed the detective, with the dangerous ring in his voice, but forgetful of his companion-radiance which rendered him such a conspicuous mark. "Back! on your peril, Jake!"

A torrent of furious, gasping oaths was the response, and then the maddened ruffian was upon him.

There was a blow, a lunge, an evasion, then a brief, scuffling struggle, and, as the brandished knife went flying harmlessly through the air, the two men went plunging over and over headlong down the stairs.

Susie and Fanny were by this time looking over the balusters, in hastily-assumed dressing-wraps; Janet could be heard coming down her stairs, apparently in a panic, while Frank Parsons's voice cried out nervously from his apartment:

"Wait till I can get on something—I'll be there in a jiffy!"

But by the time he did make his appearance, half-dressed, and revolver in hand, the struggle in the hall below was at an end, and Jake Gunter, bounding elastically to his feet after a flush knock-down blow from the detective's invincible fist, darted out of the demolished street-door and disappeared in the darkness without another word.

CHAPTER XXVI. SPECTER OR MORTAL?

THE detective made no attempt to pursue the fugitive ruffian, but looked up grimly at the pale faces and one leveled revolver that were staring down at him from the head of the stairs.

Truly, a strange spectacle he presented, with that grim battle-look in his face, and with his whole person so clothed in that brilliant effulgence that seemed to spout like a fountain out of his breast, for he had not thought of furnishing the manipulation that would have extinguished the source of it.

"Well, I—give in!" exclaimed Parsons, in a marveling voice. "Is that you, indeed, you yourself, major?"

"Of course it is," was the response. "Put up that pop! Then come down here, all of you, as soon as you can make yourselves presentable. There seem to be miracles in the air."

With that, he shoved the street-door, or what

was left of it, to, with his foot and sat down at the foot of the stair.

In the tumble down the steep stairs he had received a severe contusion in the back of the head and felt momentarily faint and weak.

They did come down in a few minutes, all of them, and it was a strangely pallid, still but partly dressed group which was assembled in the parlor, while the detective was painstakingly helped in among them by Frank Parsons.

"No wonder you're all shaken up, old fellow," said the latter, in his kindest manner. "Gad! but it's good that you carry your own radiance with you, though, like the glow-worm or the Brazilian beetle, or I might have fired."

Falconbridge had sunk into a chair and already seemed rallying rapidly, notwithstanding that he once more passed his hand slowly across his brow.

"Presently, presently! I shall be better presently."

"Take your time in explaining things," continued Frank, gently. "But, by all that's wonderful! where did you raise such a breast-pin as that?"

Here the detective, the gas having by this time been lighted throughout the entire lower part of the house, thrust his hand into his pocket and by a touch extinguished his extraordinary trinket.

"Everything in time," he replied. "How is it? Has the neighborhood been alarmed?"

"Not a bit of it, to all appearances," continued Parsons, after a glance outside through the parlor window. "And not so very strange, either. You see, save the crash on the stairs, and the bursting in of the door, there wasn't much noise. That rascal you were tackling seemed to have something the matter with his voice, or it might have been otherwise; while the isolation of the house seems to have answered for the rest."

"Quick, then! See what has become of Tommy Dodd, my assistant—a little fellow, who was left on guard outside. Something must have happened to him, or that brute wouldn't have been the bull in a china shop that he was without some forewarning to me."

Something had happened to Tommy.

He could just keep on his pins and smile feebly when Frank Parsons, assisted by fearless Janet, led him into the parlor, after picking him up out of the adjacent gutter.

But it was a grim smile, no less than a feeble one, for one of his eyes was blackened, while the entire side of his face was shockingly bruised.

His story of misfortune was soon told.

Gunter had succeeded in freeing himself from his gag and bonds in the area where he had been thrust so unceremoniously out of sight.

As soon as Tommy perceived this, and the man's evident intention of forcing an entrance into the cottage, he had rushed to his interception, pistol in hand; but the weapon had missed fire at the critical juncture, when a blow from the infuriated ruffian's fist had completed the dauntless little fellow's misfortune.

"But my pistol, my revolver!" solicitously exclaimed Tommy. "I must recover it, my liege! A gift, as you may remember (or mayn't), from the King of Ethiopia on the occasion of my espousal with his grand-niece, the Princess of the Nile." And there was a general smile at the re-assertion of his ruling passion, under the decidedly untoward circumstances, for of those present Old Falcon alone was familiar with the little chap's extravagances.

"Rest yourself from your heavy blows, my little man," said Parsons, good-naturedly. "I'll see what can be done for the restoration of your missing artillery."

He again quitted the house, and quickly returned with the fallen weapon, which, in comparison with the size of its owner, was fearful and wonderful to behold; for it seemed as big as all out-doors, according to the lodger's comment, and the only wonder was how Tommy had managed its concealment upon his diminutive person.

"Close the doors and make all snug," commanded the detective at this juncture, speaking with something of his accustomed briskness, though still dizzy and retaining his seat. "Let us have all the privacy possible, while I explain matters."

Parsons complied with his instructions, after which Falconbridge addressed himself to the women and girl, all of whom had by this time regained some sort of composure.

"You seem to have effected at least hasty toilettes, my friends," he continued, gravely. "But has none of you missed some article, usually deemed indispensable in toilette-making, I believe?"

Susie looked surprised at the question, but her sister changed countenance, with a slight blush, while Janet, as though suddenly recurring to a disturbing recollection, looked greatly concerned.

But the detective, who was studying the two latter observantly, failed to detect in either the slightest panic or consciousness of guilt.

"I ha'e lost aye o' my bonny garters," Janet was prompt to reply. "Fule that I war, too! for the clasp o' it war o' pure gowd, while it

was the only aye left to me, the ither gowd clasp having ta'en itsel' awa' lang agang."

"My experience is similar," admitted Miss Elmore, in a low voice, "though I was in hopes that my last remaining clasp was only mislaid."

The detective impressively produced the missing garters, together with the detached clasp, and held them out in his open palm.

"Hoot, mon!" exclaimed the Scotch lass, with an involuntary grasping movement, which was imitated by Miss Fanny, though less demonstratively. "It is my ain garter ye ha'e there, the aye wi' the yellow and red stripes, an' yon is its clasp-mate. What?" and then she drew back with an angry blush; "an' wad ye dare tell me ye war in my ain sleeping-room this nicht, wi' that diel's firefly ye had glimmerin' an' rayin' in your sark-front anon?"

The same suggestion had occurred to Miss Elmore, whose blushes were both painful and indignant, while Mrs. Borden was looking very grave.

"Listen to me," the detective hastened to say, though he had already deliberated.

He then gave them a complete history of the odd clasp coming into his possession, together with the incidents of the night under consideration, and his object in following the veiled woman into the house.

It can be imagined with what profound, not to say terrified, interest this relation was listened to.

"Now look here," said Falconbridge, in conclusion. "I'm not going to make any apology for whatever I have done to-night. In fact, when you have thoroughly digested all I have said, I think that you will all agree with me that no other course was left me."

"I sha'n't agree with you at all!" cried Miss Elmore, with indignant promptness. "You had no business to adopt such—such an improper course. If you had asked me about my garters, I would have told you about having missed one of my clasps, without any false modesty about it."

"Sae wad I!" exclaimed Janet. "Oh, you horrid brute! but what c'u'd I ha'e expected, wi' your spryin' on me yestreen when I was talking wi' puir Donald Brae, my kinsman, in the street beyond? For half a groat I w'u'd wring the neck o' ye, like the throat o' a wheezy bag-pipe that ye are!"

"Bless me!" cried Falconbridge, "was that your kinsman you were with, Janet?"

"It war, sir; and I'll—I'll tell him o' this insult, no less than I wull to Jamie Latham!" bursting into tears. "Donald s'al bring his claymore an' chop off your head!"

"Don't! for he came very near doing it this very night," interposed Falconbridge, who maintained his composure. "What do you think of my action, Mrs. Borden?"

Susie had looked distressed, and was still far from composed.

"It wasn't right or proper to intrude upon our privacy so—so intimately," she said. "As Fanny says, you might have asked if she had lost a garter-clasp; the same with Janet, for that matter."

"Indeed, ma'am! And will you also kindly suggest what has become of your infamous personator—your husband's murderous assailant, and the robber of the money-package that I am employed in discovering—who, ten minutes prior to my intrusions that you complain of, re-entered this house? Will you kindly suggest what has become of her, I say, unless I am, through the testimony of this tell-tale garter-clasp originally in my possession, to establish her identity in Miss Fanny Elmore's or Janet Douglas's person, and make my arrest, accordingly?"

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Susie; "I don't know what to say, or what to think. That fearful creature in my house!"

And she looked suspiciously at her own sister, no less than at Janet, in fact, considerably more so.

Fanny paled and bit her lip, while Janet, apparently overcome by such an inextricable complication of affairs, threw her arms over her head, and was sure that evil spirits were at work in it all.

"Falconbridge is unquestionably right," sturdily interposed Parsons, at this juncture. "By Jove! he could simply have acted in no other way than he has done, without surrendering his theory; and there has been only apparent indecency in his proceedings."

"Thank you, Frank!" said the detective, in a low voice.

"Well, I shall have to admit this," said Miss Elmore, who was once more composed. "But I should like to ask Mr. Falconbridge a few questions?"

"And I shall be glad to answer them frankly, ma'm," replied the detective.

She turned to him in particular.

"Which of the rooms did you first enter," she asked; "Susie's and mine, or Janet's?"

"Yours—or the one communicating with it, in which you had undressed."

"Then your first conclusion, on comparison of the clasps, must have been that I was the culprit?"

"It was—to my infinite regret and pain."

"Then why did you not take measures to place me under arrest as immediately as circumstances would allow?"

"I couldn't; your face wouldn't let me."

"What! you presumed to enter the room in which we were sleeping?"

"I did not enter but saw into it." He described the manner in which this had been done. "And when I beheld your sleeping face, I simply could not believe you guilty—proof to the contrary notwithstanding."

"But why could you not?"

Bowing: "You cannot be unaware that you are beautiful, Miss Elmore, but of course you know nothing of your face when asleep. Its simple sweetness, purity and innocence were such that I was disarmed of my resolution."

She blushed slightly.

"Thank you!" she said, in a low voice; and then resumed: "Were you similarly disarmed of your next suspicions in Janet's case?"

"Yes; though my bewilderment at finding the same proof against both of you must be taken into consideration. Still, Janet's face was also beautiful in its innocence—so much so that I could not make up my mind to anything."

Janet whipped away the apron from her head, with a broad and forgiving smile.

"Ye dinna be fuling me, Maister Fockinbrigg, I hope!" she cried. "Sure, it war my ain pur mither—lang in the kirk-yard now, God rest her!—who used to say that I war the bonniest bairn wi' smilin' in my sleep that c'u'd be found between Inverness and the Frith of Foorth!"

This was a diversion that went far to restore the *entente cordiale*, though the painful mystery was, of course, intact.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED.

"The fact remains just here," said the detective, after a long pause. "By rights of evidence, I've got to arrest somebody. The question is, which?"

And he forced himself to regard both Miss Elmore and the Scottish lass with a stern and impartial air.

"It's a riddle the Sphinx herself might be proud of," interposed Frank Parsons, with a profoundly reflective look. "It stands to reason that neither of these ladies can be the guilty woman, and yet what has become of her?"

"If she has got into my ainsel," cried Janet, with a scared look, "I hae nae knoolege o' it at all. An' yet, hooy St. Andrew! there be the knee-clapse to be answered for. Oh! might there be sic a thing as my being possessed by the diel, wi'outan my knoolege?"

None of her hearers seemed to think this likely, though Parsons was looking at her with a doubtful, if not altogether suspicious expression.

For that matter, Susie was regarding her sister in much the same manner; so much so, indeed, that the latter perceptibly reddened under the inspection.

"Why do you dare look at me in this way, Sue?" Fanny at last excitedly exclaimed, on her own part. "If you really deem me capable of this thing, I'd thank you to say so at once."

"I shall say nothing of the sort, Fan," was the collected reply. "It is altogether too grotesque and horrible! But—I can't help—thinking."

Fanny bit her lip, with more than a faint trace of the bitter temper with which Hal Borden had credited her in his reminiscential talk with Falconbridge.

As for the latter, he had been studying both suggestively implicated young women furtively, and 'thinking,' too, no less probably than Mrs. Borden and Parsons.

"Look here," he finally said; "I must ask a few questions. Janet, you first, if you please."

"Yes, sir!" And Janet, apparently more frightened and mystified than before, straightened like a ramrod.

"First, then, how did you chance to have clasps like those of Miss Elmore's, and such expensive ones at that?"

Janet stammered and was shame-faced. Then it gradually came out, and only naturally, too, that she had so greatly admired the clasps in Miss Fanny's possession as to become fascinated with the notion of owning a similar pair notwithstanding their expensiveness, and the incongruousness of such a desire in connection with her lowly station in life. Accordingly the caprice had cost her months of hard savings, but had finally been gratified.

Questioned as to the circumstances of her losing her companion-clasp, her explanation was no less natural, though she had to admit that, to the best of her recollection, she had first become aware of her loss on or about the eventful day of Falconbridge making the find in the vicinity of the train-yard gate, directly after the passing of Borden's presumable assailant over the ground.

"That will do, Janet," said the detective.

Both he and Susie seemed reasonably satisfied of Janet's deserving the benefit of strong doubts

in her favor, while Fanny, once more coldly self-possessed, remained apparently indifferent, but Parsons shook his head.

"The explanations really explain nothing away," he remarked, heedless of a furious look from the girl. "The incriminating clasp remains in evidence—that it incriminates somebody I think no one can deny—and, apart from the consideration of the girl's unsophistication—let us say, her *apparent* unsophistication—she is no more eliminated out of the accused mystery than before her examination."

"This is simply absurd!" Susie warmly interposed, taking Janet's hand in a quietly protective way which the detective found good to see. "The clasp could not have been stolen by some miscreant bent on shielding herself from possible consequences at Janet's expense, as a matter of course?" ironically. "Be of good heart, my dear! Merely to think of your having personated me so repeatedly throughout all this hideous jumble is too ridiculous!"

Parsons shrugged his shoulders, with a deprecating gesture of both hands, while Fanny bit her lips afresh.

"I suppose it's my turn now, major," she said, seemingly controlling herself by an effort. "Don't think of sparing me, I beg!"

Falconbridge turned to her reluctantly enough while Frank Parsons gave her an encouraging glance.

But Fanny's answers to much the same questions as in Janet's case elicited nothing more satisfactory.

She had not purchased her garter-clasps, but they had been presented to her by an old friend—she refused to tell by whom—months prior to the Express car tragedy. She had, however, known where they had been purchased, and remembered to have mentioned the place at Janet's request. But she had never been made aware of the latter having subsequently obtained a similar pair. Furthermore, and as to the loss of the companion clasp, she candidly admitted, as Janet had done, that she had first missed it on or about the day of her brother-in-law's misfortune. That was all; at least on the same lines of examination which Janet had been subjected to.

But when it occurred to Falconbridge to inquire if she had made no mention of her loss to Susie or any one else up to the present time, her answer was less satisfactory.

No; she had not mentioned it. Why? She did not know why, other than that she was not accustomed to discuss her private affairs with any one, being naturally reserved.

"Still, it's odd you wouldn't have mentioned such a loss, Fan," Mrs. Borden coldly interposed. "Only last week you had Janet and me helping you look up your mislaid silver arrow hairpin, not worth a tenth as much as one of those clasps."

"That is nothing," replied Miss Elmore, with controlled uneasiness. "One so misses a favorite hairpin."

"Not half so much as an every-day garter-clasp."

"What are you driving at, Sue?" angrily. "If Mr. Falconbridge elects to arrest me on suspicion, he can doubtless do so without any grenadiering on your part."

Susie compressed her lips and made no answer.

"I can't decide and I can't give up," observed Falconbridge. "It seems to me there are about equal grounds for holding the one as the other, and yet I can't venture to take you both. As it will be my individual capture either way, I think I shall send for Inspector Byrnes, and ask his advice in the matter."

He did not feel like quitting the house himself, and poor Tommy being evidently unfit for the errand, his eyes naturally rested upon Parsons.

"I'll go!" and the latter started up readily in response to the look. "Give me the address, major; or might he still be at Headquarters at this hour?"

"Hardly; what time are we?"

"Half-past one," replied the other, consulting his watch.

"Better inquire for him at Headquarters, and they can telegraph him from there to his residence. And it is deuced good-natured of you, Frank."

"Don't mention it, major. You can't wish to see this thing settled any more than I."

"Here!" The detective scribbled something on a card and handed it to Parsons, who, seizing his hat and coat, hurried away, closing the parlor door after him, as the air was chilly, with not the best of fires in the stove.

Then they also heard the street-door open and close with a bang.

"Frank is spry," observed the detective, "and, even if they shall have to telegraph for the inspector, he ought to bring him back with him inside of an hour. Byrnes will set us to rights in short order," cheerfully: "I am satisfied as to that."

Fanny Elmore and Janet Douglas exchanged curious glances.

"You must be the guilty one, since I am not," mutely exclaimed the glance of each; while both seemed to agree in adding, doubtfully;

"Yes; but arresting which one of us will the inspector think he is setting things to right?"

Frank had hardly been gone ten minutes, however, when, trip, trip, trip; swish, swish, swish! came the sounds of a woman's steps and a woman's skirts, first along the upper hall and then gliding down the stairs.

They all looked at each other in blank amazement.

The rest of the house should be absolutely untenanted! what could it all mean!

The detective sprung forward to open the parlor door, but at that instant the steps were just outside of it, and, with his hand even on the knob, the key was quietly turned on the other side, and they were temporary prisoners at least.

Then the street-door was heard to be leisurely opened and shut.

Instinctively, they all sprung to the front windows.

A figure was passing out of the gate, a graceful female figure, whose owner coquettishly paused under the street-lamp for an instant to look back over her shoulder and observe the hang of her skirts.

It was Mrs. Borden's personator, the mysterious woman of the short vail, the will-o'-the-wisp fugitive!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE PURSUIT'S QUIETUS.

THEN, just before gliding away, in the direction of Third avenue this time, the strange being turned her half-veiled face toward the astounded lookers-on at the windows.

There was a curious, sinister smile on the pretty, fresh-looking lips.

This was all that could be noticed; then she was gone.

"Merciful Heavens! my criminal double—my fiendish *alter ego!*!" ejaculated Susie Borden in a horrified voice. "Are we once more in the days of sorcery and witchcraft?"

Then, and while both Falconbridge and Tommy were tugging to hoist a refractory window sash, that they might leap out in pursuit, a man dashed by under the street-lamp in the direction taken by the vanished figure.

It was Jake Gunter, with a set, desperate face and gleaming eyes.

"Hallo!" cried the detective. "He'll have another race for her, if he dies for it, I suppose. Dence take the window—ah, at last!"

And then, as the sash was thrown up, he sprang out.

"Don't leave us locked in here!" cried Susie, in an unaccountable terror, for Tommy was following his principal's example. "I—I just can't bear it!"

"No more can I!" screamed Janet. "Dinna ye leave us! The witch might form again out o' theairy air!"

"Don't think I shall attempt another stern chase of that creature," was the detective's reassuring reply. "Tommy, run through the hall, and unlock the parlor door for them. I shall not follow further than the avenue."

Tommy obeyed orders, and the women were crowding out at the garden gate when the detective was seen retracing his steps very slowly, after having gone but a few rods, with a peculiar look.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed the Express messenger's wife. "Was there no sign of the being?"

"Not one! It's worse than that," and he pointed to a dark, huddled form, whose outlines were indistinctly visible, that was lying across the sidewalk, not far away. "Tommy must run for a policeman, and the rest of you would do better go back in, all of you."

"But what is it?"

"You recall my words of a minute or two ago, about Jake Gunter? He'll have another race for her, I suppose, if he dies for it!"

"Yes."

"They were, unfortunately, prophetic. There he lies dead, with a knife in his heart—his own knife, too, which the being must have picked up on the stairs, where it flew out of his hand in the struggle with me."

Susie looked as if about to faint, while Janet, scarcely less terrified, supported her, and Fanny alone, though very pale, managed to maintain her self-possession.

They persisted in remaining at the gate, however, even when Tommy had darted off in quest of the police, and Falconbridge had returned to the vicinity of the corpse.

And there they continued to remain until the body had been carried away, and the small crowd of horror-mongers, incidental to the arrival of the officers upon the scene, had in some measure dispersed; it being only upon the definite return to the house of the detective and his assistant, that they would consent to go back into the parlor.

All that Falconbridge said, when they were once more assembled there with their white faces, was:

"This is confusion worse confounded, though I told the roundsman all I knew or could surmise. We shall see what Inspector Byrnes can make of it when he comes."

Now, for the first time, Fanny Elmore turned to her sister with a curious smile.

"Do you still feel a sisterly preference for my arrest, Sue?" she asked, with a slight curl of her handsome lip, "as regards those incriminating garter-clasps?"

Susie burst into tears, and threw herself at her sister's feet.

"My God! can you ever forgive me, Fan?" she sobbed. "I don't know what possessed me—perhaps it was our recent differences—perhaps that old mystery about you; but it was simply atrocious, and I shall never forgive myself for it, if you don't!"

Miss Fanny considerably raised the weeping young woman, and kissed her; but it was a very mechanical sort of kiss that was bestowed.

Here Janet created a diversion by suddenly jumping to her feet, and setting up a sort of Highland Fling, while tossing her arms wildly.

"Hurrah!" she cried, half-hysterically. "Witch or nae witch, enchantress or nae enchantress, nae ain can noo say that the de'il possessed Janey Dooglas to tak' her guude meestress's form to slay an' rob in! Hurrah! hurrah! Maister Fockenbrigg, gie me back my gowd garter-clapse, an' the odd one that mates it. Sure, you dinna want to kep them noo!"

"Time enough for that, Janey," replied the detective, laughing, in spite of his troubled thoughts. "But that both Miss Fanny and yourself are out of this infernal cloud of doubt and suspicion henceforth forever, there can now be no question. And God be praised that it is so, even if this demoniac Being continue to elude me to the bitter end, and my professional reputation should go by the board in consequence!"

He spoke with unusual earnestness, and it was observed that this was the second time he had alluded to the mysterious woman as the Being.

Fanny's lip again curled.

"My own nerves are sufficiently out of order," she said, significantly, "though I manage to keep them under control. But even now I refuse to accept the supernatural in anything that has happened."

"Oh, so do I, as a matter of course," the detective hastened to rejoin, and with a feeling of discomfort under the implied rebuke. "But there is no denying that our fugitive's unexampled cleverness has a smack of something like sorcery, you know."

"I don't know, though! Superior acuteness and activity have always been stigmatized as smacking of the miraculous by those who cannot cope with them, as a ready enough excuse for their own deficiencies."

Falconbridge was, naturally, beginning to lose, or at least qualify, some of his admiration for Miss Elmore.

"Your strictures can scarcely apply to me," he said, coldly, "since I have just disclaimed any such weakness that you designate so loftily. But, perhaps, out of your own superiority, Miss Elmore, you will be good enough to suggest some prosaic and common-sense explanation of the apparent mystery surrounding this extraordinary Being's personality?" And he smiled at her contemptuous disdain of his repetition of the objectionable word.

Her only response vouchsafed was a slight dismissive gesture.

"I used to be among spiritualists a good deal before I was married," observed Mrs. Borden. "And were I still associated with them, I should doubtless regard this strange personage as an apparition. But Hal long since laughed me out of such notions. However, for all that, this seems—no less terrible than inexplicable."

"My great uncle's second wife's near kinswoman was a *gast-seer*," volunteered Janet, in a very hollow voice and with very round eyes. "The wood spirits were a' at her beck and ca', and she thocht naething o' eating her porridge wi' a wraith or two o' the departed at her side."

Here Parsons returned, accompanied by the inspector.

The latter had already been informed by his escort of the queer developments up to the time of Frank's quitting the house.

Both were now more or less dumfounded by the accounts of what had followed; for they had come direct from Headquarters before any report of the fresh tragedy had been received.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Parsons, throwing up his hands bewilderedly; "but this is nothing short of necromancy. What can you make out of it, Mr. Inspector?"

The inspector had seated himself in his ordinarily thoughtful and unobtrusive way.

"Nothing as yet," he replied, "save that these ladies are fortunately well out of what might have proved a decidedly bad box for them," with a smile and bow.

Then, after a pause, he rose abruptly, saying: "We must search every room, nook and cranny in the house instantly. It is impossible for this person to have been harboring hereabouts, without leaving some of her masquerading belongings, or some other traces of her presence behind."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK."

THE search was forthwith begun under the inspector's immediate supervision.

The prior search which the Falcon Detective had undertaken throughout the rooms unoccupied as bed-chambers, had been necessarily of a comparatively superficial nature, since he had been mainly intent upon the discovery of a person.

But now everything that could be in the remotest relation to that interesting being was in ardent and essential request.

The new search was not only an upheaval, a ransacking, but microscopical in its thoroughness.

But at last all the house, with the exception of the sleeping-rooms, had been thus gone over for the second time, without the faintest suggestion of the woman's recent presence having been brought to light.

Then the investigation proceeded with the sleeping-apartments, commencing with the attic room at the top of the house.

More hopeful anticipations had naturally been centered in this than, perhaps, in any remaining unexplored quarter; for it was something of a lumber no less than Janet's sleeping room, and from its great size might more reasonably have afforded concealment for a lurker than any other in analogous use.

But all to no purpose!

Stacks of the Borden invalid furniture and disused belongings were ruthlessly displaced and critically scrutinized; poor Janet's humble personal property was subjected to an overhauling that brought the tears of protest to her honest eyes; not even a dust heap or a newspaper pile was overlooked in the remorseless topsy-turvy search; but all without the faintest result or encouragement.

"The likes o' it!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "As if I c'u'd be harboring even a gray mouse in my ain room, wi'out to my ain knowledge."

"Never mind, dear," said Susie; they were descending the attic stairs now. "You'll have your consolation, like enough, in a minute, when they are in our room."

So she did.

The inspector, though very gentlemanly, was no respecter of persons, or private feelings, or even sex, in the sort of investigation that was under way. "Thorough!" was his motto in the official capacity, and he never deviated from his course.

The communicating rooms, front and back, were subjected to a rummaging no less pitiless and minute than had been the case in the servant's quarters.

Still to no purpose!

"Whose room is this?" demanded the inspector at last.

It was Frank's apartment, the only one as yet unsearched, at whose door he had come to a final pause, with his cohorts as it were, behind him.

"Mine!" cried the young man, jubilantly pushing back the door. "Enter, good Master Inquisitor, enter! True I spend half my time in it, without getting so much as a phantom kiss from our female Jack-o'-lantern as yet, but there is no telling what mysteries may have escaped my argus eyes. There may be Anarchist bombs in the match-box, or incendiary Nihilistic pamphlets and printing presses up the chimney, for all I know."

The inspector laughed, but, for all that led the way into the room without comment; and it very speedily assumed the appearance of having been turned inside out.

As before, to no result.

But, in stepping back over the threshold, Old Falcon stooped and picked up something.

The action could not be disguised, so he showed his companions what it was.

It was a woman's hair-pin, of the ordinary bent or fork-like design, but of gilt or gold, and with the wire on either side near the crook wavy instead of straight.

Parsons had bent forward with especial eagerness to inspect the single "find" of the long and laborious investigation.

"The proverbial needle in the haystack at last!" he cried, with an exultation that called forth another laugh. "Eureka! a hair-pin!"

The private detective gravely handed the pin to the inspector, who returned it after an apparently hasty examination.

"Not much of an outcome, eh, Falconbridge?" And the inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," was the reply, "it is better for the mountain in labor to bring forth a mouse than nothing."

"It is the kind of hair-pin I always use," interposed Mrs. Borden, "and it is not of a usual sort."

"And found in my room, at that!" gasped Parsons, striking a tragic attitude, and putting on a look of abject terror and desperation. "Here!"

And he mutely held out his hands and wrists, his knees knocking together with admirably simulated fright.

"What is this for?" demanded Falconbridge, laughing.

"The bracelets, man, the durbies, the handcuffs! My game is up! Don't you see that I

am none other than the mysterious culprit? Search my person, then. There's a chunk of chewing gum in my pocket, too, though I mostly prefer tobacco. Hurry up, and take me away!"

Both Susie and the servant burst out laughing at the comicalness of the conceit and the cleverness of the acting, while even Miss Elmore deigned to smile.

"Not quite so bad as that, Frank!" said Falconbridge, slipping the hair-pin in his vest-pocket, for all that. "It was not found in your room, for that matter, but at the side of the sill, where the door would have hidden it when closed."

Parsons drew a long breath of apparently unmitigated relief.

"You really think," he gasped, "that I couldn't even have been in secret communication with her mysterious ladyship?"

"You shall have the benefit of the doubt, at all events," interposed the inspector, laughing again. "And let me add, my young friend, that you'd make a first-rate play-actor, in my opinion."

"Thanks, inspector, thanks!" and Parsons took it upon himself to lead the retreat downstairs. "But so long as I don't make the petticoated mystery, I'm more than satisfied. Come along; and, if there is an all-night beer saloon in the neighborhood, the growler shall be forthwith passed at my grateful expense."

Nevertheless, Falconbridge and the inspector exchanged a significant glance, unperceived by the others, on the way back to the parlor.

Here Frank really did induce Mrs. Borden to produce a good-sized tin pail, as a 'growler,' with which he hurried away, notwithstanding that it was now between four and five o'clock, returning ten minutes later with a brimming and foaming supply of the popular Gambrinian beverage, which is testified (mostly by interested saloon-keepers, to be sure) to cheer but not inebriate.

"I won't give the Dutchman away who sold it to me," observed Parsons, while dispensing the contents of the pail in goblets which had been forthcoming, "for he was also engaged in the heinous offense of card-playing with a couple of his all-nighters. But I will say that his saloon is neither in a church nor an undertaker's basement, though the latter might be deemed singularly appropriate to the business by some of our temperance fanatics."

But, even with the beer and the badinage, everybody was now feeling depressed, while the women were beginning to show the effects of the excitement and their broken rest in their worn faces and tired eyes.

"There's just this about it," said the inspector at last, after the exchange of another private glance with Falconbridge, "I am intent on watching this thing out up to breakfast-time, if needs be. So, ladies, you might as well seek once more the repose which has been so shamefully disturbed, and that forthwith."

But this would not be listened to, for more reasons than one.

Susie declared that she wouldn't be able to close her eyes in sleep again, even if she should go back to bed; Fanny was still interested in the investigation, she averred; and Janet, on her part, called the shades of her departed kinsmen to witness that she would throw up her employment and set sail for the Land o' Cakes within twenty-four hours if compelled to occupy the attic dormitory for another night, or remnant of a night.

The inspector looked at his watch.

"Nearly half-past four," he remarked. "I shall adhere to my determination, of course," settling himself back in the best easy-chair which had been placed at his disposal, "but would feel easier if I could send a message to Headquarters meantime. There is a memorandum on my desk, which ought to be in the hands of my representative without delay. Where is your boy, major?"

A gentle snore from a small sofa in a further corner was the best response to this question.

Poor little Tommy, after bearing up bravely and smiling thus far, had succumbed to fatigue and the beer at last, and was now curled up in the arms of Morpheus, with his blackened eye and bruised little face turned pathetically up to the light.

"I'll carry your message, inspector!" cried Parsons, apparently with his accustomed good-nature. "It would be worse than brutal to wake up that poor little fellow, and the run in the morning coolness will freshen me up."

The inspector thanked him, and the proffered service was accepted.

"Don't stop for another growler until on your return trip, at all events!" he laughingly called after the obliging Parsons. "Remember that."

A response in kind was returned, and then the two remaining exchanged yet another glance as the young fellow disappeared with the message.

CHAPTER XXX.

YET AGAIN.

INSPECTOR BYRNES could be a most interesting man when he felt disposed to talk freely.

He was so disposed now, and he and Falcon-

bridge were soon engaged in a lively exchange of their professional experiences, chiefly for the entertainment of their female listeners, who were becomingly interested.

"I followed up a case somewhat similar to our mystery now in hand, years ago," said the inspector, in the course of his remarks. "The case was out West, and was what was known as the Haunted Shanty Case."

"The mystery had started in with so-called spiritual manifestations. There were unaccountable rappings, bell-ringings, tin pan beatings, furniture displacements, and the like all over the place."

The occupants consisted of a rough, honest settler, his wife, two sons, young men grown, a comely daughter of seventeen or eighteen, and a weazened-faced, crippled child, a little girl of fourteen, intelligent, but malformed from birth, who had never been known to have the use of her lower extremities.

"The family would have been driven out of the premises, but for their poverty, and the consequences of their having no other refuge."

To the aural were finally added visible manifestations. When the rappings and bell-ringings would take a rest, a white-clad, ethereal figure would stalk or float around, hiding its face, and seeming to melt away before the too inquisitive gaze.

"The place became notorious throughout the neighboring farms and settlements, and, as I chanced to be in an adjoining town at the height of the excitement, it was made worth my while to attempt a natural solution of the mystery by a committee of anti-spiritualists, who were dumfounded themselves, and yet were desirous of proving the thing a deception for the special discomfiture of a considerable number of spiritualists, who were advertising the manifestations everywhere as a proof of their belief in spirit communications with the natural world."

"After a brief preliminary examination of the Haunted Shanty and its inmates, I agreed to begin operations by passing a night in the place, on condition that I might do so alone, the family meantime to betake themselves to the house of a neighbor."

This was acceded to, rather reluctantly, it seemed to me, by the family, at the insistence of the committee-men, and I was left in solitary possession.

"The night passed without any manifestation whatever, save the gnawing of an occasional rat or mouse, and perhaps some spectral snortings and gruntings from a neighboring pig-stye."

"This seemed pretty conclusive evidence to me that the manifestations were intimately related to the family whose peace-of-mind they had contributed so much to disturb."

"So I resolved to pass the next night (the night time was almost exclusively the chosen period for the manifestations) in the bosom of the shanty family."

"This was done, and the manifestations were on hand with the enthusiasm of hungering stomachs after a prolonged fast."

"Nothing was left out of the programme, apparently. Bells jingled, dishes rattled, chains clanked, raps tattooed and groans sounded here, there and everywhere; and, notwithstanding that the house consisted of but three rooms, I was unable to even suggest a cause."

"We were all together, with the exception of Lina, the crippled little girl, who had been carried off to bed in one of the smaller rooms adjoining and communicating with the larger and general apartment in which we were sitting."

"Let us see how Lina is bearing up amid all this hubbub," said I at last, and, rising, I took up the lamp. "The poor little thing ought to be scared into fits by this time."

"As I had expected, this proposition was met with decided opposition, on the part of the family present, especially by the mother."

"Oh, no! you mustn't disturb Lina!" she exclaimed, barring my way at the communicating door. "She doesn't mind the racket at all, and sleeps through it in a sort of trance."

"But I none the less pushed my way past her, notwithstanding certain black looks on the part of the family group, and approached the cot in which the child was lying."

"At the first glance she did seem fast asleep, sure enough, but, on passing my hand over the pale little forehead, I found it very warm, while her pulse was also found to be coursing very excitedly for one who was really in slumber."

"All right!" I remarked, with an air of being quite convinced against my will. "The child must really possess an unusual nerve to be able to sleep thus unconcernedly. It is truly very extraordinary!"

"The family, who had followed when unable to intercept me, seemed greatly relieved at this."

"The little cuss is a sort of trance-meejum, we think," said the man of the house. "Come an' set down ag'in a spell, an' we may see a sperrit or two. But you mustn't attempt to move or interrupt in the slightest way, or the cirkelation of the ethurial fluid will be bu'sted."

"Sure enough, not long after we had resumed our seats, the lamp having been extinguished, leaving no more light in the large, rude room than was afforded by the faintly-flickering embers in the wide fireplace, there came a sharp

thump from an invisible banjo, or something of the sort, the outer door was thrust violently open, and in among us sailed the first materialization.

"It was that of a veiled and white-clad female figure, extremely tall and lath-like, and seeming somewhat diaphanous in the uncertain light. I made no move as yet, and my companions remained as if spellbound and awe-struck, while the phantom silently careered around among us like a marionette in a pantomime, tapping us on the head, chucking us under the chin, and indulging in various occult playfulnesses of a like description, after which it suddenly swished out of an open window, and was gone.

"A second materialization was quickly on deck, however—shorter and chunkier than the first, but not noticeably different in appearance and antics.

"'This sperrit,' said the woman of the house, in a sepulchral whisper, 'is a school-mate of mine what was choked to death by a peach-stone in the dim and mystic long ago. I know her by that peculiar droopin' movement to one side, for she had a tearin' big bunion on her right foot. Be keerful not to interrupt, for that ere ethurial fluid is all-fired sensitive.'

"Well, to make a long story short, the chunky peach-stone victim was succeeded by another and yet another, until at last I grew tired of the humbug, and incontinently 'interrupted' the mystic fluid by grabbing the materialization firmly in my arms.

"She kicked and scratched considerably, for a 'sperrit,' and the whole family indignantly cornered me with waving impromptu cudgels and furious expletives, but I summarily quieted them and compelled the relighting of the lamp, by the opportune display of the revolver, when the cheap trick that had imposed upon the credulity of almost an entire community for over a twelve-month was effectually exposed.

"The trickster in the humbug was Lina, the pseudo born-cripple, who it was subsequently proved had only been temporarily disabled by an accident shortly prior to the arrival of the family in that region from distant parts, and had not long therefore recovered her activity; which, however, had been kept secret and thus utilized, probably in the hope of some shrewd speculator ultimately taking up the girl for exhibition through the country.

"You see the family were shrewd, ignorant and starving poor, and, though they might have honestly been deceived by the girl's cleverness at first, they had wound up—"

But there was to be no formal wind-up to the inspector's entertaining story at least.

At that instant there was a repetition of the footsteps and skirt-rustlings on the floor above, followed by their descent of the stairs, which had preceded the apparition of the mysterious veiled woman in the former instance.

The inmates of the parlor, with the sole exception of the sleeping boy, sprung to their feet in an instant.

"This is just what I have been hoping for!" cried the inspector, springing to the door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MYSTERY HOLDS ITS OWN.

Too late again!

No precaution had been taken of changing the key from the outside to the inside of the door, and once more was the bolt silently turned into the lock before the latch could be twisted back.

Then there was another rush to the front windows, and once more was the inexplicable veiled double of Susie Borden seen to pass coquettishly under the street-lamp—whose light was now fast yellowing under the clearer brightness of the dawning day—with another mocking, sinister look upturned to the witnesses.

But her movements were necessarily expedited on the present occasion.

The inspector was already half out of the window in headlong pursuit, and the Falcon Detective, who had remained at the door, was simultaneously turning back the key by the application of a pair of nippers to its projecting inner point.

In fact, the masquerader had barely time to produce a paper full of flat lozenge-shaped little objects, which she scattered about her on the sidewalk and the short walk inside the gate, after which she broke into a swift, gliding run in the direction of Third avenue.

Even then, though, she might have been intercepted by the inspector, but for Fanny Elmore, who, suddenly beside herself with nervous excitement, it would seem, grasped one of his coat-tails just as he was making his flying leap, while screaming out:

"You must not pursue that demon, you must not! She will kill you!"

As a consequence, the luckless inspector plunged out and down upon his head, in lieu of his feet, alighting with a thud upon the little patch of grass between fence and porch, where he lay momentarily motionless and stunned.

This accident was almost simultaneously ac-

companied by another hardly less unexpected and deplorable.

The lozenge-shaped objects which the fugitive had scattered about her on taking to flight subsequently proved to be small cakes of toilette soap of exceptionally smooth and slippery composition.

Hardly had the inspector's discomfiture been effected in the unforeseen manner as set forth, when out over the porch-steps rushed Falconbridge, revolver in hand, at a single bound.

But hardly had his feet struck the intervening short pavement when, alighting upon a couple of these treacherous little articles, up flew his heels, down went his posteriors, and then away he shot, with the force of a prize battering-ram, carrying the closed gate clean off its hinges, and finally bringing up amid its debris, with a most paralyzing kerthump, half-way to the middle of the street.

Mrs. Borden screamed and Miss Elmore clasped her hands, while Janet, more practical, though equally excited, skurried out of the house, with a Clan MacGregor shout, to minister to the fallen heroes.

Falconbridge, however, had succeeded in scrambling to his feet in time to fire a couple of shots after the fugitive as she was in the act of flitting around the avenue corner.

Then, after an instant's hesitation, he ran to the inspector, who was now sitting up in a dazed and bewildered way, while the Scotch girl was endeavoring to assist him to his feet.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the detective, laying hold of him; "how is it with you, and how did it happen?"

The inspector fumbled behind him, and pointed frowningly toward the window, where Fanny was standing, frightfully pale, and with the missing coat-tail still in her convulsively clasped hands.

"Dear me! I meant it for the best," she stammered hysterically. "That woman—somehow I suddenly got the impression that she was a born devil!"

"Which was an excellent reason for you to enable her to escape from my clutches, as a matter of course, young lady!" was the inspector's sarcastic rejoinder. "Quick, major! we may yet get a parting glimpse of the witch."

And, seizing the detective's arm, altogether forgetful for the moment of his grote que rearward aspect, he hurried him away with him in the direction of the avenue, though at a wavering gait that told of the severe shaking up he had received.

Janet could not resist the temptation to follow them, now that the daylight was perceptibly broadening, and this she did, with a parting gesture for the ladies at the windows.

As they turned into Third avenue, a fresh and startling surprise awaited them.

It was that of Frank Parsons leaning against an Elevated Railroad pillar, his coat cut open down the front, his shirt-front disordered and stained with blood, his face blanched, his eyes staring at them with a fixed, horrified expression.

"Oh, the poor young gentleman!" cried Janet, clasping her hands. "Is it Maister Parsons hissel', or his wraith?"

As for the mysterious fugitive, she was nowhere to be seen.

The inspector and Falconbridge ran up to the young man.

"Speak, Frank!" exclaimed the latter, "what has happened?"

"The strange woman—Susie's Double—the she-devil!" seemed all that he could gasp in response.

But they hastened to support and encourage him, and gradually, in a few disjointed words, he made them acquainted with the situation.

According to Frank's story, he had descended from the Elevated Railroad station, two blocks lower down, after leaving the inspector's message at Police Headquarters, and was walking up the avenue toward the familiar corner, when he was unexpectedly met by the flying woman.

Surprised as he was, he had instantly drawn his pistol, and sprung to intercept her.

But she had eluded him with panther-like activity, at the same time drawing and lunging furiously at him with a dagger.

He had felt himself dangerously cut, a sudden faintness had overcome him, and he had probably grasped the iron column, with a half-conscious movement for support, but a few minutes before their arrival.

In the meantime, the inspector had torn back the slashed portions of the young man's coats, waistcoat and shirts, to perceive that he was, to all appearances, seriously, but not dangerously, wounded.

Frank was accordingly escorted back to the house, where he was put to bed, and the services of a surgeon summoned forthwith.

It was now broad daylight, and a little later on, the inspector, accompanied by Falconbridge and Tommy Dodd, took their departure, the former having prudently resumed his overcoat as a covering for the damage sustained by his nether garment.

The trio came to a pause at the street-corner where the inspector should branch off in the

Old Falcon's Foe.

direction of his residence, and here Tommy was dismissed for much needed repairs in his own case.

"Well?" demanded Falconbridge, with an inquiring air.

"It is simply tremendous, major!" remarked the inspector, slowly. "Who and what can the woman be?"

"Ask me something easier, inspector. But you saw for yourself."

"Yes; and on the finding of that hair-pin I made sure that this fellow, Parsons, was in some way privy to the strange creature's success."

"So did I."

"But that is not to be thought of now."

"By no means. The devil! Why the man is badly wounded, besides half-terrified."

"To be sure. But have you any one else in your mind who might be leagued with the adventuress?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Fanny Elmore."

"My suspicion exactly. It wasn't through any nervousness that she blocked my pursuit from the window, nearly breaking my neck into the bargain."

"You are right there, inspector. Miss Fanny is not one of the nervous sort."

"Major, I am going to do you a favor."

"Thank you in advance, my dear sir."

"But you don't know what it is. *Sub rosa*, then, I'm going to leave you a clear coast in this mystery case."

Falconbridge grasped the other's hand with genuine thankfulness. It might seem to some an equivocal favor to be given undisturbed possession of a case which, even at this stage, afforded so little promise of an elucidation; but, nevertheless, the consciousness that hereafter—with Jake Gunter also eliminated out of the competition, and Frank Parsons hardly to be longer thought of in a like connection—he was to be rid of all rivalry in the investigation, was a considerable weight off his mind.

"I can only thank you again, inspector," was the detective's simple but earnest acknowledgment.

"Good and welcome! And a final hint for you, if it hasn't occurred to you already."

"What is your hint, my dear sir?"

"Watch Fanny Elmore, if you would meet with speedy success."

"Thank you just the same, inspector, though this had already impressed me."

And then they separated.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CLEAR FIELD AND NO FAVOR.

THE Falcon Detective, after sleeping the greater part of that day whose early hours had been so crowded with excited incident and adventure, awoke with a sensation of relief and buoyancy such as he had not experienced for a number of days.

It was now Thursday evening, the mysterious criminal was still unidentified, a rising and vanishing enigma, and he would have to effect her capture by Saturday in order to keep faith and reputation with the Express people, but he bounded out of bed with renewed resolution and hope revived.

Gunter was beyond further intermeddling; poor Frank was doubtless booked for bed or house-confinement for several days at least; and Inspector Byrnes had generously agreed to stand aloof.

At last it was "a clear field and no favor!"

While he was finishing off his toilette in the neat little parlor and dressing-room communicating with his bed-chamber, from which it was separated by a *portière*, a servant brought him a telegram, notifying him that he would be expected that night in Boston aent the re-opening of a somewhat ancient criminal case in which he had formerly been employed.

He smiled a little derisively at the idea of his quitting New York at this critical period in the far more alive and important business already engaging his exclusive attention and energies, tossed the dispatch still open upon his writing-table, and proceeded with his toilette, impatient to be once more on the track of his champion mystery, as he had long before this begun to consider it.

A moment later, however, Master Tommy Dodd, one side of his face in artistic patchwork, as a gentle reminder of the preceding early morning's adventures, put in the otherwise natty and smiling appearance that was his wont.

"A fair lady at the postern, my liege, craving an august audience!" was his characteristic greeting.

"A lady?"

"From heel to head-dress, my lord."

"What lady?"

"Miss Elmore."

The detective gave a low whistle.

"Has she seen you?" he asked, after a slight pause.

"No, most gracious sir. One of the castle's churls admitted her, in the aged seneschal's absence, and I, peering down from the first landing of the hoary turret's winding stair—"

"Enough of that! Grab my valise, and, when

she enters, be found stuffing some of my wardrobe into it, as if for dear life. Remember, we're pressed to catch the Boston Express in response to that telegram yonder. Be lively!"

The boy sprung to obey, and almost at the same instant a servant appeared announcing the lady's name and request.

"My respects to Miss Elmore, and admit her at once," was the reply.

A moment later he was politely receiving his visitor, seating her in his best chair at the writing-table, where the open telegram could not fail to catch her observant eye, expressing his appreciation of the unexpected honor of such a visit, and making excuses for the disheveled appearance of the apartment, all pretty much in a single breath.

Fanny had entered with a not very assured air, but now as she became aware of the disorder of the room, and especially of Tommy Dodd's frantic haste with packing the valise, she looked somewhat relieved, though her face was seldom much of an index of her thoughts or emotions.

"You seem to be preparing for a journey, sir?" she observed.

"It's business first always, ma'm, in my profession, you know?" was the detective's evasive reply; and he then turned his back to her under a pretense of making a dive into the lower drawer of his dressing-case, in order to afford her the opportunity for scanning the dispatch at her elbow. "Still, I trust you are bringing me news that poor Frank proves to be less seriously hurt than we feared."

Before she could reply, Tommy Dodd began to fume and objurgate in a terrible state of exasperation while endeavoring to cram yet another article into the gaping portmanteau, which already seemed full, to bursting.

"Here, you young rascal, what is it?" chided the detective, though with difficulty restraining a smile at the little fellow's vehement acting of his part. "No profanity before a lady, or you will hear from me unpleasantly."

"But dod rot this wescut, major!" sputtered Tommy, purple in the face and fairly dancing on the valise with both feet; "it just won't go in, and that's the holy, jumping truth of it."

"Tut, tut! what of that? Leave the garment out, or find room for it when you pack your own things. There is a little more time than I thought," consulting his watch. "So don't get yourself into an unnecessary sweat."

"A rather hurried call for both master and man, it would seem?" interposed Miss Elmore, smiling.

"Oh, hurry's no name for some kind of calls, miss!" And with a long sigh as of intense relief over some pressing task, Falconbridge indulged himself to seat *vis-a-vis* with his visitors.

"But you surely can't be contemplating any prolonged absence from the city, sir?" Fanny went on. "Your urgent duty in our mystery case, as I suppose I may call it, cannot admit of that?"

"Well, I don't know; why can't it?" with a reflective air. "In view of our present discouragements, I should say that might safely keep a week as well as a day. While this reopened Boston case of mine—Well, Miss Elmore, needs must when the devil drives, as the old saw goes."

Fanny was quite at her ease now, if she hadn't been altogether so before.

"But you haven't told me how Mr. Parsons is," Falconbridge went on. "Or if you did, I was so impolite as to interrupt you."

Miss Elmore caused her handsome face to lengthen perceptibly.

"Poor Mr. Parsons is in a bad way," she gravely replied. "While the cut he received was neither deep nor dangerous in itself, there is danger of blood-poisoning. At all events, the surgeon is sure he will have to keep his bed for a week, if not longer."

"Bad, bad! too bad!"

"But he will have the best of nursing, which they say is a great thing. I have undertaken the duty myself," blushing with apparent naturalness. "He seemed to desire it so much, poor fellow! In fact, my time is limited now, I am required so constantly at his bedside."

"Fortunate man, even in his misfortune!" was the detective's gallant compliment, though he could not help adding inwardly: "How the deuce did I come to admire you at the outset, my young lady? for without doubt you are one of the most accomplished and thorough-paced hypocrites that I know of. Only your secret love for Parsons, if that be sincere, can excuse your arrant dissimulation in this matter."

"But, Mr. Falconbridge," Fanny went on presently, with an excellent air of hesitating timidity, "it—it was with regard to a different subject that I have ventured upon this visit."

"Don't mind Tommy, ma'am," she had glanced at the boy suggestively. "He's all right!" with a good-humored smile, as he settled himself for an anticipated confidence. "And I am quite at your disposal."

"I have been anxious," Miss Elmore went on, "about the impression Inspector Byrnes may have taken with regard to me—perhaps a wholly wrong impression, Mr. Falconbridge. Indeed, sir, I was prompted by a sudden fear lest that

terrible woman would take his life, and had no notion of facilitating her escape by my frantic attempt to pull him back!"

"Oh, don't worry over that! It may have all passed out of his mind by this time—probably has."

"But I must worry—I can't help it, sir! And the thought he may still have such an utterly false impression, and that perhaps even you may share it with him, is distracting."

"Now do make yourself perfectly easy on this score, my dear young lady. There is really nothing in it worth worrying about."

"But I can't help it, I say! The bare idea of any one supposing me capable of sympathizing with that infamously strange Being is insupportable!"

"Hello!" with a good-natured laugh. "So she is a Being now, even in your philosophy ma'am?"

She laughed, too, though a little nervously.

"Oh, I didn't mean it in a supernatural sense exactly."

"Neither did I, perhaps, when you took me to task for the use of the word. Come, now, think no more of this."

He shook hands with her, and looked at his watch significantly.

"I shall try to take your hopeful view of it, then."

She arose, while Tommy had by this time begun to wrestle with a second portmanteau.

"My sister and Frank—Mr. Parsons, will be grieved to know of your quitting the city at this critical juncture. But I suppose it can't be helped; and I must now hurry on my own account, or my invalid may fear I have deserted him."

The detective respectfully kissed her hand as she was quitting the room, and then picked up a card she had inadvertently dropped, but without calling after her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS FANNY'S DISSIMULATION.

THE card was that of the Cunard Steamship Co., with a list of its vessels' names, and their order of sailing.

Hardly had the detective heard the lower street-door close upon the departing visitor, before he kicked one of the portmanteaus clear across the room.

"Quick, Tommy, after her!" he exclaimed. "Report to me at the Italian restaurant, where I shall be waiting supper for you. Lose not a moment, or you may lose her."

Tommy was up and away, without a word, and almost before his brief instructions were spoken.

"So!" muttered Falconbridge, the card still in his hand, "is the place getting too hot for our fair mystery, and is Miss Fanny the go-between for an ocean voyage in contemplation? Well, day after to-morrow is not only my last day of grace with the Cosmopolitans, but the next Cunarder sailing-day, as well!"

It was nearly two hours later, about eight in the evening, when Tommy Dodd rejoined his principal at the Italian restaurant that had been indicated.

It was in a private cabinet, and the boy's eyes—or rather his one eye that was not undergoing silent repairs—lighted up, as he beheld the preparations for a "spread" upon the cozy little table at which the detective was awaiting him.

"Well, my boy, out with your news!" exclaimed Falconbridge, giving a last order for the prospective repast. "Of course she hurried back to her invalid direct, as she was so anxious to do?"

"Yes, my lord," and Tommy dropped into the chair set for him with a hungry little smile, "of course she did—not."

"Ah, indeed! Well, where first?"

"Offices of the Cunard Company."

"What did she do there?"

"Engaged and paid for two first cabin fares by the Aurania next Saturday."

"For two, eh. What names did she book?"

"Mrs. Henry Mountjoy and maid."

"Humph! where next?"

"Corner Bleeker street and Broadway."

"What to do there?"

"She had a five minutes' conference with a high-toned swell there, boss."

"High-toned swell's name?"

"Preacher Walsb."

"Look here, Tommy, you are growing interesting! Where next?"

"Home to her invalid."

"Good, and very good! We'll now fall to, with a trust that good digestion may wait on appetite, with not a Banquo at the feast."

On the way up-town, after the discussion of an excellent supper, Falconbridge, still accompanied by his faithful little coadjutor, stopped at the office of a surgeon and physician, who was embraced by the wide circle of his friendly acquaintance.

It was the professional who had been called in to minister to Frank Parson's injuries.

"How is our patient of this morning, doctor?" he inquired.

"All right, except for nervous shock, perhaps," was the composed reply.

"Wound not so bad as we had feared at first, eh?"

"A mere flesh-wound, though occasioning serious blood-letting."

"Any danger of blood-poisoning?"

The surgeon burst into an amused laugh.

"None whatever, nor of anything else. Preposterous!"

"How long before your patient should be about once more?"

"A few days, at the furthest. Still I can't say as to that. The young fellow is emaciated, and may have sustained a serious nervous shock, besides the loss of blood. I can tell you more particularly to-morrow."

"I want to request you to keep mum as to this visit of inquiry."

The physician, who had had professional dealings with Old Falcon before, bowed his assent.

"One thing more," said Falconbridge, after a slight pause. "Might the young man's wound have possibly been self-inflicted?"

"Without a doubt, though my impression is that it was not."

"Why?"

"Well, in that case he would hardly have stabbed so long and deep. Self-inflicted wounds—in furtherance of some trick or deception, as you would seem to imply—are not apt to so narrowly miss the vitals, as in this case; to say nothing of the preliminary rip down through several garments of stout material, which would require the exertion of more muscular violence than Mr. Parsons would seem capable of expending upon himself."

"Thank you kindly, doctor; and pray don't forget that this is *entre nous*."

Tommy Dodd had been waiting for his master outside, and, half an hour later, they were once more at their post of secret observation opposite the Borden cottage.

"We must not forget that we are now in Boston, or on our way thither," Falconbridge had said, as a general precaution. "It will never do for Fanny to suspect that we have deceived her, though I would like to have a chat with Mrs. Borden, which I am sure she would keep in confidence."

As it was still in the shank of the evening, as you might say, or not yet ten o'clock, there was still a chance of this; and presently, much to the detective's satisfaction, Susie made her appearance from the house, evidently bent on some errand in the neighborhood.

He followed her around into Third avenue, and smilingly confronted her as she was coming out of a shop which she had entered.

Susie, who was looking unusually anxious and disturbed, gave a surprised but gratified start.

"Why, major!" she exclaimed; "this is an unlooked-for pleasure. Why aren't you on your way to Boston, as Fanny was sure you would be?"

"I haven't the slightest intention of quitting New York," was the hurried reply. "You must give me a confidential talk without delay, if it is possible, Mrs. Borden."

Impressed by his earnestness, she took her place at his side without a word, and they were soon slowly threading a comparatively secluded street.

"You are looking worried," said the detective. "But I can scarcely wonder at it."

"Oh, it is nothing but fresh worry and trouble, my friend!" she replied, mastering her voice with some difficulty. "Just think of it! Janet and I are now virtually by ourselves, for, with Mr. Parsons disabled and Fanny nursing him almost exclusively, we see little of either of them. And then how can we tell when that horrible, murderous woman may chance to put in another appearance? Couldn't you manage— But then I forgot that you are supposed to be out of the city."

"I wish that impression to keep, especially with Miss Fanny and your lodger; and do not imagine that you are to be left unguarded. I shall still be on the watch."

Then he told her briefly of his visit from Fanny, and the result of Tommy Dodd's subsequent shadowing of her movements.

"This is startling!" exclaimed Susie. "Mr. Falconbridge, I regard you as an old friend, and I trust you will place the fullest confidence in my discretion."

"It is not for that purpose that I have sought this interview, m'am."

"Oh, you are so very good! But what do you make of all this, sir?"

"Simply that your sister has been in secret collusion with the Mystery, perhaps from the very first; and is resolved to become the companion of the creature's attempted flight abroad, day after to-morrow—for that it will end in a mere attempt I must look to."

"But this is terrible! It seems uncharitable to think hard of one's own sister, but, do you know, I have feared that she might be the Mystery in her own person."

"Of course you have; but that is out of the question now, garter-clasps to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Certainly; but do you think that Mr. Par-

sons's injuries might have been self-inflicted, and he also been in collusion with the terrible creature?"

"Unfortunately, upon that point I am still all at sea; and I want your secret observation to assist me to a decision."

"I shall do all I can, and yet—"

"What is it?"

"I just hate Frank Parsons! Did Fanny tell you—but of course she wouldn't—that he had the impudence to beg *me* to be his nurse?"

"No, but I can imagine it. I have often suspected him of cherishing a secret admiration for you."

"Let him only dare— But he shall get out of my house somehow by Saturday! I told Hal so to-day. You know that is the day for Hal to come back to me. As if I would consent to have Parsons on the sick list there at the same time!"

"What did Hal think?"

"Oh, he thinks I might get more help and manage with both of them! You know how he doats on Frank; though, if I were disposed to let Hal into a secret or two with regard to that virtuous and unimpeachable young man— However, no matter. Out he goes as my husband comes in, or I don't know what I'm talking about. If a hospital was good enough for Hal, it ought to be good enough for Frank Parsons."

"Still, it would be good policy, if you could try to keep Parsons on for at least a day or two after Hal's return."

"Major Falconbridge," with set teeth, "I just hate that man! He—he is not honorable!"

"I shall not inquire into anything that may have given you this impression regarding Frank's character, Susie. But let me ask at least this much—that he be permitted to remain where he is till Monday."

"Well, I'll think it over—perhaps."

"You see," continued the detective, earnestly, "this plan of Fanny's to run off to Europe with the Mystery (which I now accept as scarcely beyond doubt) complicates matters wonderfully. To do that, she will have to desert her invalid, you know."

"Oh, yes; I hadn't thought of that."

"Let me tell you this: Your husband has already acquainted me with the history of Frank's first becoming your lodger."

"Yes."

"There was some sentiment between Fanny and him at first?"

"Yes; I should say there was."

"And it has probably now revived, at least on your sister's part?"

"Like enough."

"How then can she bring herself to desert him?"

Susie remained silent, and seemed to be reflecting deeply.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUSIE BORDEN'S DILEMMA.

"I DON'T know what to say or think," said Susie, at last. "If Hal has acquainted you with Fanny's past history, no less than with what he knows of Frank Parsons's—"

"(He has.)"

"Then you must know, Mr. Falconbridge, that my sister is a very—eccentric woman, to say the least."

"Of course, I know that."

"Well, then, I can imagine nothing of her supposed connection, with Madam Mystery, as I presume we can call my errant and incomprehensible double, except with more or less reference to the strange sort of men and women that she used to have appointments with."

"You think she has given over that inexplicable custom, then?"

"I hope so."

"And I am afraid not."

"What can you mean, sir?"

"Well, this man with whom she exchanged words this evening, on Broadway and Bleeker street, after visiting the steamship office."

"True; was he a suspicious character?"

"One Preacher Walsh, a notorious crooked man, in open or secret connection with many criminals."

"Heavens! and she could deign"—Susie stopped short, beating her foot irritably upon the ground.

Their walk had by this time led them to Central Park, at the shaded wall of which they had come to a pause.

"I am sorry to say," observed the detective, "that this discovery goes deeper than the mere impropriety or rashness which it suggests, at the first glance, on the part of Miss Elmore."

"Do be explicit, major."

"This same crooked individual is also in some sort of secret communication with Frank Parsons." And then the detective related the Bleeker-street incident which had come under his own notice.

"Little mysteries and big ones! wheels within wheels!" cried Susie, in despair. "What can it all mean, Major Falconbridge?"

"That remains to be discovered. But now you will perceive the extent of the complication in which we are involved in regard to your sister's intentions."

"Yes, yes."

"If Parsons and she are both in collusion with Madam Mystery—we will suppose with a division of the stolen money in the prospective—and, through this collusion, in communication with other desperate characters of the Preacher Walsh type—and we are also to take into account the hypothesis of Fanny being in love with Parsons, how can we reconcile her intention to abscond for foreign parts with Madam Mystery on Saturday next with the consequent desertion of Parsons on his bed of suffering, which that would imply?"

"Oh, I don't know! Do not ask me! And yet wait—a possible solution occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"Why may not she and Frank have already agreed to the former taking this step, with the understanding that he shall join the fugitives abroad at his leisure, or when able to travel?"

"I have already thought of that. Indeed, for the present at least, we shall have to accept this hypothesis to go on. But now don't you see the prudence of keeping Frank in your house at least over Saturday, even if Hal's return from the hospital should add so greatly to the inconvenience of all? For Fanny's disappearance then (the steamer sails at ten in the morning) to carry out her flight in Madam Mystery's company (which, of course, I shall be on hand to prevent) will necessarily force some sort of an explanation or self-exposure out of the abandoned invalid."

"I do see the policy of it, sir," Susie replied, very slowly, "but—you see there is more than the inconvenience, as it now appears to you, to take into consideration."

"Pray explain, Mrs. Borden."

"Janet wants to leave me—that is the long and short of it. And how can we think it but natural in the poor girl, after all? Is there one in a thousand who would have remained even this long in such a place?"

Here was a fresh quandary, to be sure; and the detective knitted his brows without answering at once.

"This is my chief domestic dilemma now," continued Susie. "And when you come to consider how difficult it will doubtless prove for me to fill the girl's place capably, if it can be done at all, you will understand something of the extent of my worriment."

"Still, the lass is fond of you personally. Has she said plumply that she must leave your service?"

"Hardly; but I cannot doubt but that she is rapidly making up her mind to that effect. I can't blame her. Brave and hardy as she naturally is, she is daily growing more worn and anxious, and seems to start at the slightest sound."

The detective here touched his companion's arm warningly, and they silently drew more deeply into the shadows, as three figures, who appeared to be conversing earnestly in low voices, were observed approaching the near-at-hand Park entrance.

The trio proved to be Janet Douglas herself and two men, whom the detective recognized as Jim Latham and the girl's awkward and gigantic wild Highland kinsman, Donald Brae.

Their voices became distinct as they passed, and entering the Park, they fortunately occupied a bench which was likewise within earshot of the listening pair.

A policeman was not on hand to prohibit their entrance into the Park after the interdicted hour (nine in the evening), but then it is a regulation more honored in the breach than the observance, at best.

The substance of the conversation overheard proved to be a sort of relief for Mrs. Borden especially: for it was speedily evident that Latham, doubtless with a lover's solicitude, and supported by the kinsman into the bargain, had been endeavoring to persuade Janet to throw up her employment in the uncanny Borden household, as he characterized it, but thus far without success.

"Dinna ye speck to me mair, Jamie, ou this soobject, nor you nuther, Donald Brae!" exclaimed the girl, decidedly. "Once for a', a' wull nae think o' sic a thing!"

Latham made a despairing gesture, while the doughty Highlander, who was slouch-hatted and buttoned up to the chin, after what appeared to be his gloomy and romantic fashion, was seen in the uncertain light afforded by a neighboring lamp, to knit his bushy brows in a profoundly reflective scowl.

"But, Jane, my dear!" continued the former, "you'll surely allow that there's something wrong about the house?"

"Richt or wrang, and wi' the de'il himself into it beside, hoorns, hoofs an' tail!" she cried, with a heartiness for which Susie Borden could have hugged her; "I'll nae desairt my puir young mistress in her troublle. God forgive me that I did think o' sic a thing at first! but it's a' ower an' done. A' s'all stick to the roof-tree, Jamie!"

Latham might have made yet another effort to change the girl's mind, but at this juncture an unexpected diversion was caused by the gloom-empanoplied Mr. Donald Brae.

He suddenly leaped to his feet, with a sort of Gaelic battle-cry, tore open his long length of

buttoned overcoat, and then, with a flourish and a shake, his ponderous two handed claymore whistled and glistened in the dim air in portentous arcs and circles.

"Whoof!" he ejaculated, in a species of rasping whisper. "A strange country is this to be sure, but show me the specter, be it rcober, t'ief or detective man, that wull face me wi' my feyther's feyther's gude soord in my hand, that was bathed in blude on Culloden's gory fiel'! Janet, my ain young kinswoman, it's Donald that wull fecht for ye while the lavrock warbles and the heather blows."

Latham had doubtless had some experience with Mr. Brae's eccentricities before.

"Oh, give us a rest!" he groaned, in deep disgust. "You'd better either swallow that infernal old hedge-bill, or join the Caledonian Games, you unmitigated Scotch jackass! Otherwise you may find yourself cooling your red head in a precinct ice-box."

But Janet, with more charity for her kinsman's unsophistication, spoke to him soothingly, and at last induced him, though reluctantly, to effect the disappearance of the fearful and wonderful blade in some mysterious manner amid the intricacies of his inner garments.

Shortly after this the trio continued their stroll through the Park.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WATCH RESUMED.

The detective turned to his companion with a smile.

"Do you not think," he said, "that you can now safely dismiss your apprehensions as to Janet's defection?"

"Indeed, I can," replied Susie. "What a dear, faithful creature she is! But who can that extraordinary man be, and where can he hide that preposterous weapon upon his person?"

"The second part of your question is too much for me," laughing. "As for the first, the man is Donald Brae, Janet's kinsman, who probably mistakes our quiet Park nooks for his native glens, and our citizens for a community of robbers in more or less disguise."

And the detective related his own experience with the eccentric Scot, in which he had so narrowly escaped decapitation.

Mrs. Borden finally agreed to follow his wishes in the matter of permitting Parsons to remain at her house over Saturday.

"Do you think I had better tell Hal all these new features in our case when I call at the hospital to-morrow?" she asked, preparing to retrace her steps.

"Yes," was the reply, after a pause. "And if you have no objection, and will name your hour, I shall meet you there to share in the consultation."

"Objection! I shall only be too glad." And she accordingly mentioned the hour.

"Now one thing more before we separate," said Falconbridge, appearing struck by a sudden idea. "After that, as it is still not very late, you can return home alone, and go to rest with the assurance that my little assistant and I shall be on the watch outside for the remainder of the night."

"What would you ask me, my friend?"

"This: What was the name of the young man, whose wedding with your sister was, so fortunately for her, interrupted years ago?"

"Albert Delaine."

"What was he like in appearance?"

"I do not know."

"You never saw him?" in surprise.

"Never; I was very young at the time, and visiting at a relative's far away from home."

"And you never saw even the young man's picture?"

"Never even that. If Fan has treasured one of him, she has kept it a profound secret."

"Mrs. Borden, one more question, and I am done. What city was your family home at that time?"

"Cincinnati; Fanny and I were both born there."

"That is all; and thank you very much."

But Susie's curiosity was by this time excited.

"Why all these questions of so long ago?" she demanded.

Falconbridge smiled.

"You have privileged confidences that I would not think of intruding upon," he replied. "Let me reserve this to myself—at least until day after tomorrow."

She good-naturedly assented, and they then separated.

Falconbridge rejoined Tommy Dodd a few minutes after Mrs. Borden reentered her house.

"What news?" he asked.

"Nothing to report, boss, except that the Scotch gal went off up the hill with two men, one of whom I took for Jim Latham."

"Ah, I happen to know that; and here is Janet returning at this moment."

After Janet had also disappeared into the cottage, the long hours began to pass slowly for the watchers, with nothing to break the weary monotony of their vigil.

Slowly the aspect of complete repose settled down upon the place, until finally, by midnight,

every light had disappeared from the house-front, with the exception of a faint one in the window over the street-door, which indicated the room in which the wounded Frank Parsons lay.

The favorite station of the secret watchers behind a great old ailanthus tree directly across the way from the cottage, and immediately behind which was a narrow passage between the blank walls of two disused buildings, formerly the wings of a large brewery, connecting at the rear, and whose parent building, also unoccupied, fronted on the next cross-street to the north.

This narrow passage, which was closed by a stout but unsecured door or gate, had been superficially investigated by the detective, against the possible chance of its affording a convenient hiding-place in case of necessity; and Tommy Dodd had likewise been inducted into the secret of its possibilities.

One of the wings at the side of the passage had been the ice-house of the brewery, and presented neither door nor window to the street. The other had been for the storage of malt, and had a narrow street-door, doubtless well secured against trespassing, but only windows high up near the roof, together with a projecting fall, or hoistway, directly over a great opening for the reception of grain when hoisted from trucks below, and which was in its turn in the middle of the front, on a line with the windows, and imminently above the street entrance.

It was past midnight, and the secret watch-keepers were still keeping up their observation, when footsteps were heard along the lonely street, and presently a man, whom neither of them recollects to have seen before, came to a pause under the oft-alluded-to street-lamp.

There was something stealthily observant and expectant about this man, and, strange to relate, after a momentary glance up over the cottage front, he turned and looked intently across the way toward the malt-house.

As he did so, he gave three ringing raps on the sidewalk at his feet with a thin walking-stick, which seemed to be a steel rod.

Almost instantly, in response, there was heard a movement inside the door of the malt-house, nearly directly back of the tree behind which the watchers were concealed.

Falconbridge silently touched his companion's shoulder.

An instant later they had effected their retreat into the between-walls passage, after pushing open the gate which they then placed ajar, so that they could peer out.

This had scarcely been done when the malt-house door opened, and a man stepped out of it whom they at once recognized as no other than the crook, Preacher Walsh.

He advanced as far as the tree, whose shelter had just been abandoned so opportunely by the two watchers, signaled, and was instantly joined by the man from across the way.

"What have you made out, Preacher?" demanded the latter.

"Not much of anything," was the reply, in an equally cautious tone. "But that must be Frank's room in which the dim light is shining."

"Mightn't it be a 'plant'?"

"Nonsense! I know he's laid up in there. The Lady gave me the tip herself on Broadway."

"The Lady herself?"

"Yes."

This conversation was distinctly overheard by the lurkers near at hand, much of it being carried on in *argot*, or thieves' Latin, in which both hearers were proficient.

"Well, it ought to be an easy job to make sure," said the first speaker.

"That is so; wait!"

Preacher Walsh accordingly stepped into the middle of the street, and, selecting a handful of small gravel, threw it with great dexterity, so that it rattled lightly against the window-panes through which the dim light was shining.

Instantly there appeared behind the panes a shadowy form, which appeared to be peering down into the street.

It disappeared when the preacher had made a significant gesture, and then the latter rejoined his companion under the tree.

A moment later the cottage door opened noiselessly, and Miss Elmore slipped out under the lamp, muffled in a large cloak, whose hood was drawn over her head and face.

"Sure enough!" muttered the first speaker; "it is the lady herself."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISS ELMORE'S STRANGE ACQUAINTANCES.

She paused a moment in the yellowish radiance of the street-lamp, her fine figure showing stately and erect in spite of her disfiguring wrap, and then, after a penetrating gaze into the deep shadows cast by the tree, fearlessly joined the men who were awaiting her under it.

It was instantly noticeable that their bearing toward her was one that may be described as an uneasy respectfulness, while hers was such as to suggest as great a remove from familiarity as an iceberg is from a hot fire.

"So it is you, Preacher?" she said, coldly, re-

cognizing the man addressed. "You have a companion?"

"Yes, my lady. This is Mr. Raretton, of whom you have doubtless heard Franks speak at some time or another."

"Perhaps," with a penetrating and distrustful glance at the companion spoken of, who bore the scrutiny very creditably. "Why are you here?"

"Well, you see," Preacher Walsh explained, "Raretton grew sort of uneasy when he heard from me that Franks was down with a cut."

She was about to reply, apparently with anger or contempt, when she abruptly checked herself.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "Let us be sure we have no spies or eavesdroppers. The house has been watched off and on by a detective and his imp."

"A detective!" echoed both men in a breath.

Instantly they were alert, their eyes searching their environments with the gleaming suspiciousness of hunted wolves, their right hands groping in their bosoms with deadly suggestiveness.

"What detective?" growled Preacher, after a slight pause.

"Falconbridge." Both men started, muttering a curse. "Look in that narrow alley-way there!"

This was speedily done, but only to find it empty, the two watchers having taken the hint to plunge noiselessly far back into the dark recesses of the passage.

They were quickly back at their post again, however, when the danger of detection was past.

"We're safe, I think," said Miss Elmore, calmly.

"I can answer for the malt-house, too," observed Preacher. "I had it all to myself after forcing a little door far back in the passage yonder."

"A shot at Old Falcon would have made me feel good," growled Raretton. "My best pal is in State Prison through that infernal hound's sleuthing."

"Enough of this!" interposed Fanny, abruptly. "Why are you here? That is what I want to know."

"As I was saying, my lady," Walsh began over again, "Raretton here, and some of the others, too, if the truth must be told, felt uneasy about Mr. Franks being down with a slashing, after I gave them the tip received from you, and—"

"What was there to be uneasy about?" She impatiently interrupted. "Was not my word sufficient?"

"The word of the lady is always sufficient," was the humble reply. "But—you see, since we know that Franks is the fence for the disposition of the Express car swag, and, as the gang are entitled to a divvy of one half, besides most of 'em being more or less dead-broke—"

"This must not be!" imperiously. "There must be absolute confidence placed in Mr. Franks and me, or—well, there is an end of it. He has not distributed the money, for the best reasons. In the first place, the bills are of large denomination, and in this instance separately marked with the company's monogram, so that there isn't a bank or important shopkeeper who isn't on the lookout for them, to say nothing of the detectives throughout the country. Then the hunt is still hot after the woman who did the job. This accident to Franks can not make any difference one way or another. Even if he had not met with it, he would not be able to hurry the matter."

"When does he think he can make the divvy?" asked Raretton, a little rebelliously.

"By next Monday, and as to-morrow is Friday, you surely won't have much longer to wait. Franks bade me tell you so."

"That's sound talk!" the Preacher interposed, with satisfaction.

"Perhaps so," grumbled Raretton. "But there's so much magician work that you can't blame the gang for getting uneasy."

"What do you mean by magician work?" demanded the lady sharply.

"Oh, you ought to know! Isn't it funny work enough that the job should have been dished by a moll that none of us know or ever heard of? Franks alone seems to know anything about her, unless maybe you do, my lady?"

"I do not—once for all! It is the one confidence that Franks refuses persistently to release in me. And why, after all, should we complain? Isn't the mere fact of the woman having been able, with Franks coaching, to hoodwink and laugh at even Old Falcon all this time sufficient evidence of their ability. Of course, the woman will ultimately be known to all of you when it can be done with safety to herself."

"But that is just what makes us suspicious," persisted Raretton. "They're so infernally clever between the pair of 'em that we fear they may skip, forgetting us."

"I'm not one of the growers, though; please remember that, Sam," again interposed the Preacher. "By Jupiter! the woman is a queen-pin, whoever she is, and will deserve anything the gang can do for her when she does get ready to declare herself."

"That's all very well—in its way," was her

companion's discontented reply. "But you know as well as I that that isn't all of it?"

"Explain yourself," interposed Miss Elmore, imperiously again.

"Why should the woman have slashed Franks? It is agreed among the fly-cops that she did so."

"Mr. Franks makes no secret of her having done so. He can only account for it by her excitement, which prevented her from recognizing him at the time. Do you forget that she was hard hunted at the moment, with Falconbridge and the inspector himself at her heels?"

"I hadn't heard of that."

"Well, inquire more closely as to the facts. But all this is neither here nor there. If you suspect the good faith of Mr. Franks, wait until he can get on his feet again, and he will answer for himself. If you can't wait for the Unknown to declare her identity, suppose you try tracking her down on your own account. That fool of a brakeman tried it on once too often, it would seem."

"Lord, but she's a coker!" exclaimed the Preacher. "But look here, Raretton, we can't decently keep the Lady out here any longer, especially when she has assured us that by Monday the divvy will be ready for us."

"That is all right," assented the other.

The then separated, "the Lady" going back into the house, after a few parting words that were inaudible to the secret listeners, and the two rogues starting off at a brisk pace, but coming to a silent pause not far away.

"So!" thought the detective; "these rascals are not so credulous as they would have 'the Lady' and Mr. Franks believe. At all events, their suspicions are aroused, and they will henceforth be on the watch against the meditated treachery."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MALT-HOUSE.

THE overheard conversation between Miss Elmore and her unworthy acquaintances had enlightened the detective upon several important points.

First in importance of these was that the mysterious woman was no less an enigma to the rogues than to himself.

Mr. 'Franks,' of course, was none other than Frank Parsons; and that the latter was bent on cheating his criminal associates by conniving at the contemplated escape to Europe of Susie Borden's double in Miss Elmore's company, doubtless with the stolen money-package in their possession, seemed equally evident.

But was the identity of the masquerading criminal known to Fanny as well as to Parsons?

He was disposed to think that it was; but the general result of what he had overheard in his own mind was, as can easily be seen, only to render the mystery of that flitting and occult personality even profounder and more complete than before.

Who and what was the extraordinary being who could thus fairly revel in crime with seeming impunity, who might almost be said to possess the faculty of appearing and disappearing at pleasure, who was both ubiquitous and nowhere in a breath?

While these reflections were passing in Falconbridge's mind, the boy at his elbow in the dark passage, where they had remained, suddenly whispered:

"Boss, they are coming back! Mightn't they take the notion to come in here to enter the malt-house by the door the preacher spoke of as forcing?"

"They're more likely to enter it, if at all, by the street-door Preacher came out of," was the detective's reply. "However, there's nothing like being on the safe side. Come!"

And, having satisfied himself that the crooks were really retracing their steps, he forthwith led the way back into the alley for a considerable distance.

Here, by listening intently, they presently became aware that the men had entered the malt-house by the street-door.

Then only did the detective venture to turn on the pocket battery connected with his electric breastpin.

The light suddenly diffused in this manner quickly revealed the side-door in the malt-house door.

Extinguishing his illumination, the detective silently forced the door, and entered with his companion.

A flitting lantern, far on the opposite side of what seemed a great vacant space, apprised them that the men were moving cautiously, doubtless for some nook of observation well-known to them.

Then the lantern went up and up, as if a staircase were being ascended, though the footsteps that attended it were not audible, and presently disappeared.

Falconbridge once more struck up his breast-light.

It was an immense and lofty room comprising the entire area, empty, with the line of the staircase, by which the rogues had ascended, just visible on the further side.

First making sure that there were no open hatchways overhead, by which his light would

be thrown through the ceiling, Falconbridge noiselessly led the way to and up the staircase, shielding the rays of his bosom-lamp with his hand.

A similar great room was overhead, which was tenantless, showing that Preacher Walsh and his companion had ascended yet higher.

Our detective and his assistant followed, and presently, upon reaching the loft of the building, the lantern of the rogues could be seen motionless and glimmering off toward the front.

Again extinguishing his light, the detective cautiously led a creeping advance in that direction.

Walsh and Raretton were presently discovered ensconced in a cozy nook behind the open fall-way from which they could completely overlook the street below and the Borden cottage opposite.

Heaps of bagging had been utilized for their comfort, and there were other indications that this was not the first time the outlook had been made use of as a surreptitious outlook.

Falconbridge and Tommy also found some gaming-sacks, upon which they could rest at ease within earshot of the fellows who, now that they were feeling secure in their eyrie, were conversing without restraint, the dark lantern, which they had hung against the wall to one side of the opening, affording sufficient light to reveal their forms with considerable distinctness, without penetrating far enough back into the interior to betray those who were spying upon them.

In fact, it was an odd case of spies spying upon spies, the outcome of which the detective could not as yet foresee.

But the conversation that was going on between the two rogues was of a sufficiently revelatory character.

"What a lunkhead you can be on occasion, Sam?" Walsh, who seemed to be in a bad humor, was saying. "Was there any need of letting the Lady know that the gang is growing suspicious of Franks and herself?"

"Oh, it won't make much difference," was Raretton's reply.

"The deuce it won't!" with an oath. "It will simply increase their caution, and, if they really mean treachery, it will be just that much more difficult for us to catch them at the game."

"One or another of the gang can keep an eye on 'em from this cock-loft from now till Monday, at all events."

"Till Monday!"

"Yes, of course; and then, if the divvy isn't in readiness for us, according to the Lady's promise—"

"Oh, Lord! you make me tired."

"What's the matter now?"

"Why, you unmitigated dunderhead! don't you see that, if treachery is meant by Franks and the Lady, by Monday they will be just nowhere?"

"Franks himself can't skip, though, on account of his wound."

"Perhaps not; but what's to hinder the Lady skipping, doubtless with our unknown in her company, the money package in their possession?"

"What! and deserting Franks, no less than the gang?"

"Why not? Couldn't Franks join 'em abroad at his leisure?"

"But what would the gang be doing to him?"

"Bosh! Haven't you found out by this time that the gang is mightily afraid of Franks?"

"Oh, I suppose there's not one of us he couldn't safely give away to the beaks, while saving his own bacon! Good fence that he is, he has always been a complete mystery to us. But still he would hardly venture to cheat the gang outright and then laugh at them."

"Of course, he wouldn't be fool enough for that. But he could pretend that the Lady and the unknown had disbed him, no less than the rest of us, and his being on his back from this stab would go a good ways to support such a claim."

"It wouldn't with me."

"Nor with me, neither. But you wouldn't dare defy Franks any more than I would."

"Not to his face, I grant you. But for all that he is one of us, and treachery doesn't often go unpunished with the gang. One or another of them would be found to lay him out."

"And thus lose to us the best fence and go between that ever a swell gang had in the world? Not much. However, don't understand me as being particularly desirous of shielding him; and then you must remember that we've got to be sure of treachery first."

"What do you propose—just keeping a lookout on the cottage from this window till the stipulated Monday comes and goes?"

"Bah! as if that could eucher my lady, if she were bent on mischief, with Frank at her back? I've a plan, though."

"What is it?"

"Well, let me make some premises first."

"Go ahead."

"If the skip is intended, it is meant to take place between now and Monday?"

"Of course."

"And blue water would most likely be the chosen field?"

"Yes; it would be Europe or nowhere."

"Well—let's see; we're long past midnight and into Friday, aren't we?"

"Yes; it is about two o'clock."

"Good! Steamships don't start for Europe on Fridays, eh?"

"No, not as a rule: the sailor's unlucky day, you know."

"Exactly; and neither do they start on Sundays, that I know of. How about Saturdays?"

"A common enough starting-day with 'em, I believe."

"With one or more of the big lines, at least. Well, then, if the skip is intended, with blue water as the outlook, Saturday, to-morrow, will be the day?"

"Like enough."

"Well, there you are, then."

"What do you mean, Preacher?"

Preacher Walsh laughed contemptuously.

"Oh, God, my boy!" he exclaimed; "you ought to have been a college professor. As a mere crook you are out of place."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NETTED.

RARETON grew angry.

"Look here, Preacher!" he exclaimed, sullenly; "you've got to let up in your chaffing, or you and I will quarrel."

The superior rogue shrugged his brawny shoulders.

"That would be an awful calamity for me, as a matter of course!" he sneered.

"I won't have any more of it, I tell you!" with an oath.

"Oh, there, Sam!" placatingly; "do try and be a little less stupid, then, if you don't relish chafing."

"I'm no stupider than yourself, curse you! If you weren't so infernally ignorant, and could state your case with some clearness, there would be no difficulty in understanding you."

Walsh again shrugged his shoulders, a little irritably this time, though he managed to keep his temper.

"Here's the case," he went on. "Our game is just to find out what European steamer or steamers sail to-morrow, and then to be on the lookout at the docks. You can surely understand that."

"Yes, because you are beginning to express yourself like a human being, instead of like an infernal fool."

"Thank you, Sam; I'll owe you one for that."

"Make pay-day when you please, Preacher."

"Humph! Well, the Lady and the Unknown will be there. Of course, whatever disguise they may be in won't amount to anything with us."

"Well, what then?"

"What then? Why, it will be just a case of tapping 'em on the shoulder, and then something like this: 'Dear friends, shell out that Express package, and go in peace, or—would you prefer to be introduced to a cop or two before starting?' Understand?"

"Yes; and that will do."

"It is agreed, then?"

"Certainly."

The listening detective had by this time made up his mind for a *coup*. The plan of interception, as at last agreed upon by the two rogues, might seriously interfere with his own scheme for the recovery of the stolen money and the capture of the Unknown at one fell swoop, and he resolved to nip it in the bud.

He accordingly touched his little companion's elbow, as an intimation that sharp work was close at hand, and awaited his opportunity.

It was not long coming, as the bad blood which had been generating between the rogues was now on the point of breaking out.

"It's a good thing, Raretton, that we are agreed on this thing at last," Preacher Walsh, after a slight pause, drawlingly resumed, while calmly lighting a cigar.

"I suppose it is," was the insolent rejoinder.

"We might have hit upon the plan long ago, but for your continued beating about the bush, through your blasted ignorance."

"Ah, indeed!" with a dry laugh; "but why not ascribe the delay to where it belongs, Sam?"

"Where is that?"

"There you go again! Just as if you weren't aware of your enviable reputation with the gang!"

"They think as much of me as they do of you!"

"Perhaps—when they think of you otherwise than as the champion jackass of Manhattan Island, with just enough sense in your spoonful of brains to step under cover when it rains real hard."

Raretton uttered a furious oath, and struck his companion a fierce blow in the throat.

The attack was not unanticipated, however; and the next instant the two rascals, both of the active and powerful men, were rolling upon them floor in a brutal but comparatively silent grapple, their caution still controlling them in a general way in the midst of their personal fury.

It was Old Falcon's opportunity.

Instantly the fighting rascals were appalled by a sudden blaze of light, and there, towering over them, stood the dreaded detective himself, wreathed as in a garment with an intense and dazzling brilliancy, a mocking smile on his lips, his weird little assistant at his side.

The grapplers burst apart, doubtless with the intention of uniting their powers against this unexpected peril, but they were too late.

Before they could recover from their amazement, almost before they could draw a second gasping breath, they were overpowered, handcuffed, and deprived of their concealed weapons.

Then Falconbridge quietly propped them against the wall, covering them with his revolver, and made a sign to Tommy Dodd, who thereupon darted away in the direction of the stairs.

"He will bring the cops with the least possible delay," observed the detective, blandly. "Don't be impatient, Preacher, nor you neither, Mr. Raretton. All things come to those that wait."

Walsh was the first to recover from his surprise.

"You've got nothing to hold us on, major," said he, calmly.

"Ah, indeed? How are you here, then, except by house-breaking, as the forced side-door below will prove? I fancy that charge will keep you in quod as long as I want you out of the way, which will only be over to-morrow."

The Preacher's face had lengthened considerably at this.

"Why do you want to keep us in the cooling box over to-morrow, major?" he asked.

"You might otherwise interfere with certain plans of my own on the steamship dock to-morrow." Both Walsh and Raretton looked not a little panicky at this. "But you needn't be alarmed," with a reassuring smile. "I'll gladly interview the Lady and her Unknown as your proxy, in the matter of that Express package."

"What?" demanded Raretton, with a frightful oath; "were our suspicions founded on fact, then?—are they really intending to cut and run with that swag?"

"For a surety; but keep up your heart, both of you! I'll be on hand to intercept them, if you are not."

The rogues ground their teeth, and said no more.

Ten minutes later Tommy returned with two policemen, by whom they were quietly transferred to the police-station, with no one in the neighborhood being any the wiser for the incident.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CLEVER PRELIMINARY RUSE.

OLD Falcon and his assistant accompanied the prisoners to the station, where, after the latter had been conveyed to their cells, the detective made such representations to the sergeant in charge as would insure their being deprived of their liberty, even after being taken to court, until the ensuing Sunday morning, at all events.

It then being well on toward daybreak, Falconbridge and Tommy returned home, not altogether dissatisfied with their night's work.

"Come right up to my rooms with me, my lad," said the detective, as they were entering the house. "I want your judgment on a little matter before you retire."

Tommy silently obeyed, and they entered the detective's lodgings just as the gray early light was making itself distinct from without.

"Wait here!"

Then the detective passed into his bed-chamber, dropping the folds of the *portiere* behind him.

Five minutes later, a figure reappeared, which caused Tommy to leap to his feet, and produce his great revolver in astonishment; after which, upon recognizing the detective under a fictitious character that had been assumed, he fell back with a short laugh.

"By the Lord, boss," he exclaimed, "how did you catch on to the Preacher's points to that nicety?"

"What?" said the disguised Falconbridge, with a smile; "you were really deceived at first, then?"

"I should say so! Why, you've even got the crook's twang of voice to perfection!"

The detective complacently surveyed his transformation in his mirror.

The crook's outward personality was successfully imitated to a dot, in costume, bearing, beard, carriage—everything.

"You think I'll do for a visit to a sick man and his nurse this morning, then?" he asked.

"Of course you will, boss. But may I ask if it's Parsons you're intending to visit, sir, and why?"

"Yes, Tommy, and I'll tell you. It is indispensable that I should assure myself without delay of the real extent of this rascal, Frank Parsons's, invalidism, and equally indispensable that both he and Miss Fanny should remain under the impression that Old Falcon and Tommy Dodd are in Boston."

"Oh, I see, sir! But—may I make a suggestion, major?"

"Of course you may."

"Well, then, boss, you may remember that it

was Miss Elmore herself who first suggested to her companions of a few hours ago the possibility of our spying upon their interview?"

"I do, my lad; and you argue from that that she might not have taken much stock in my going-to-Boston ruse?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have thought of the same thing, but am inclined to think that the suspicion was rather the outcome of an excess of precaution on her part than of any strong distrust of our own good faith in the Boston trick. However, my forthcoming visit shall set that matter, no less than others, definitely to rest. I shall now take a nap in my easy-chair, after setting my alarm-clock for nine o'clock, which will give me sufficient recuperation. You can sleep till noon, however, and an hour later I shall expect you to meet me at the Grand Central."

This arrangement was followed out, and promptly at nine o'clock Falconbridge quitted the house in his new character.

After a hasty breakfast, he was proceeding to take the Elevated cars for the vicinity of the Borden cottage, when a pleasant voice called after him:

"What, Preacher, is it you? And is it this way you pass an old acquaintance?"

He turned to confront an attractive and richly-dressed young woman, well known to him as a highly expert shop-lifter and member of the swell mob at large.

"Yes, Lucy, it's me," he genially replied. "And of course I didn't see you till you spoke. How's luck?"

"Bad," with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, "though I can stand the lush, if you are thirsty."

"It's too early for me, Lucy; and you'll have to excuse me this time."

He remained chatting with the woman for several moments.

After they had separated, and he had turned to look after the trim retreating figure, the disguised detective gave a sudden start.

What was that peculiarity in Lucy Windham's graceful walk, as observed from behind?

Surely it bore a strange resemblance to what he had remarked from the very first in the walk and carriage of Mrs. Borden's mysterious double! In vain had the detective sought for that identifying singularity in the walk of both Fanny Elmore and Janet Douglas; and here it was unexpectedly suggested to him, at least, in the person of this light-fingered and notorious adventuress.

Could there be anything in this? He reflected. This woman's height and figure were in favor of such a possibility. So might her face be, if wearing a half-vail; for she, too, was a blonde, young, fresh-looking, and with a chin and lips not strikingly dissimilar from Susie's. Moreover, her other characteristics were not inconsistent with the more desperate features as thus far exemplified by that terrible role. In addition to her cleverness and intelligence, she was notorious for her muscle and fearlessness, had once nearly killed a burglar-husband for his infidelity, and, in spite of her amiable and lady-like ways under ordinary circumstances, was known among her criminal associates of both sexes as "Deadly Luce," with whom it was not safe to be at odds.

However, after turning the matter over very thoroughly in his mind, the detective dismissed it thence, temporarily at least, and pursued his way to the Borden house.

"You here!" was Miss Elmore's angry but low-voiced greeting when she confronted this visitor alone in the parlor, whether he had been rather curiously shown by Janet—Mrs. Borden being absent on an errand. "Preacher Walsh, how dare you show yourself here?"

"Now do let me explain, my lady," returned the detective, imitating his prototype's nasal voice and propitiating manner, no less than his general air and bearing, to perfection. "I ain't going to give anything away, or kick up any disgrace."

"You'd better not!" and there was a hushed fury in Fanny's composed face that suggested deadliness. "But go on, and then get out."

"I can't get out. That's just the trouble. You see, my lady, we, that is Raretton and I, fell in with quite a bunch of the gang an hour or two after our confab with you."

"Well, well? be quick."

"The long and short of it is just this: Nearly every one of 'em except myself is dead-suspicious."

"Of what?"

"Of Franks's playing 'em false. So I'm here as a sort of delegate to see if he really is as bad off as is made out, or is only shamming. Hold on now before you fly off the handle. It's at my suggestion and in Mr. Franks's real interest that I am here. They've agreed to bide by my report, which I want to make it as good as I can for him. Otherwise—"

"Well?" sternly, as the fictitious crook came to a suggestive pause.

"Well, ma'm, otherwise they just won't wait till Monday, as Raretton and I promised to do on our own account, you know."

Fanny paused in thought, while the detective could not but wonder at the nobility of her stern and set yet beautiful features in conjunction

with the criminal associations in which she seemed to have become so hopelessly entangled.

Instinctively the words came into his mind: "How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"

"Wait, and I will see," she said abruptly. "You must visit him, if at all, and get away, without my sister seeing you."

She quitted the room, returning at the end of five minutes.

"You haven't picked up anything, I hope?" she unceremoniously asked, looking suspiciously about the room.

"By Jupiter! no, ma'm," exclaimed the detective, almost startled out of his assumed character. "Come now, my lady, that ain't the fair thing!"

'The Lady' made an indifferent gesture.

"Come, then; he will see you."

And the visitor was forthwith conducted to the bedside of Frank Parsons, alias Mr. Franks.

CHAPTER XL.

MISS ELMORE'S INVALID.

THE detective was absolutely startled at the emaciated change that had taken place in Parsons's appearance, which was so great as to suggest that much of it might be due to adventitious aids.

But Fanny was watching too closely to admit of his making any critical test in this respect.

The whilom jovial, buoyant, fresh-colored young man was apparently the mere shadow of his former self.

His cheeks were colorless and chalk-like, his lips pinched and blue, his eyes, dilated as with a preternatural brightness, peered out of their hollow sockets through the dim-tempered light of the sick-room with a strange curiosity at the visitor, while his hands, which were lying outside the coverlid, were as helpless and waxen in appearance as those of a consumptive at the point of dissolution.

"So, Preacher," spoke out the seeming moribund, "you are come to see me; and our good friend here, the Lady, tells me why."

He spoke in a hollow but distinct tone of voice, and, seemingly without effort.

"Yes, Mr. Franks," replied the pseudo-crook, in a really shocked tone, "but good Lord! none of 'em could have dreamed of your being brought to this pass, or my coming wouldn't have been insisted on. By Jupiter!" with a stronger expletive; "it's an infernal, blasted shame, Franks!"

The invalid gave a wan smile.

"Let me caution you against using that name here," he said. "Here I am known as Parsons—Frank Parsons."

"All right, Mr—Parsons. But, good Lord! this is simply awful."

"No it isn't—my appearance is deceptive, Preacher," Parsons quickly replied, and yet with ill-concealed satisfaction at the impression created. "My wound is really improving, though temporarily at the expense of my constitutional energies. I shall be on my feet again inside of a week. My physician is sure of it."

"The Lord knows I only hope he is right, sir."

"And now what is all this about? Our friend here, the Lady, says that you fellows are suspecting me of meditating some sort of funny work."

"I'm not!" cried the visitor, quickly. "Don't forget that, sir."

"Good enough, Preacher. But what does the gang, then, suspect me of meditating?"

"I'll speak plainly, sir."

"That's what I want you to do."

"They fear you may be thinking to give 'em the go-by, in the matter of that Express package divvy."

"In what way, pray—by turning up my toes before making it, eh?"

"Well, sir, if they could only judge for themselves, as I am doing now, that might be the size of it. But as it is—"

"Go on!"

"They think you may be intending to let the Lady here go off across the blue water, taking the Unknown and the swag together with her, and leaving you to follow when able."

There came a sort of amused chuckle out of Parsons's throat.

"Now really," said he, "suspecting that to be my intention, Preacher, how long do you think before I would be able to follow them?"

"Just never at all, unless, may be, in your coffin, sir!" was the quite hearty response.

"You do look about as fit for traveling as a Sing Sing 'lifer' for a weddin' breakfast!"

"Aha! Well, then, joking apart, what object could I have in getting away thus dishonestly with a bagatelle of ten thousand dollars—I through whose hands so many times over that amount has been negotiated in the interest of the gang?"

"Well, you see—to tell the truth sir, I don't exactly know how the suspicion arose in this instance. But it's all-fired strong; that I know."

"Then it is to be met as it stands, of course. What will disabuse 'em of it? That is the question."

"My report of how you're looking, for one thing, sir. But then they might as well have some additional guarantee, perhaps."

"Humph! Wasn't the Lady's assurance to you and Rareton, that the divvy shall be made by next Monday, enough?"

"Well, it seems not, sir."

"But why not?"

"I rather fancy, sir, that they think the Lady and the Unknown might slip between now and then, with the swag."

"So! What can I do to convince them to the contrary?"

"I hate to say it, Mr.—er—Parsons."

"I want you to be as blunt as you can."

"Well, then, I am given to understand that two things will make 'em perfectly easy."

"What are they?"

"Proof, through me, that the money in the package is still intact—hasn't been meddled with at all; and the name of the fly woman, the Unknown, who knifed the messenger and got away with the boodle so trim and neat."

The detective spoke thus boldly not without certain misgivings as to its possible effect upon the security of his disguise, but the genuineness of his utterance was evidently not thought of in the surprise which it occasioned.

"They must think me an eternally blasted fool!" exclaimed Parsons, with an angry effort; while Fanny, who had thus far been merely observant, raised her head haughtily.

"Let them think and act as they choose," she said, turning toward the couch. "Have you had enough of this sort of thing?"

"Yes; but don't be in a hurry," replied the invalid, recovering his temper. "I say, Preacher!"

"I am at your service, sir." And the pretended crook bent forward.

"Won't anything else but this satisfy the suspicious fools?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Not even my present helpless condition here, which you will be able to report on to the gang?"

"It ought to, and I'll try it, if you say so, sir. It would for a dead surety satisfy me, if I chanced to need any satisfying, which I don't."

"Well, you'll have to try it on, at all events. As for my making known the Unknown to them as yet, that is simply out of the question. And as for my satisfying them as to the Express package being still in my possession and intact at that—see here!"

"Yes, sir," eagerly.

"Look all around this little room, and take in every feature of it with your professional eye, Preacher."

The disguised detective did as he was bidden, though having already done as much covertly.

"Yes, Mr.—er—Parsons; all right, sir."

"Got everything down pretty fine, eh?"

"I think I have, sir."

"Well, that money-package is not only intact, but also at present concealed in this very room. And yet, my man, were I able to sit up, or to stand the bother of it, I'd cheerfully offer to make you a present of half the contents if you could bring it to light in a whole day's search, which should also include my person to the bare skin."

"Oh, you're joking, sir."

"As I hope to get on my feet again, I am in perfect earnest. So, now you can judge for yourself as to whether I am still the custodian of the package or not. Good-day, Preacher; and just tell the gang what you see fit. I'm about exhausted. The Lady will see you to the lower door."

This terminated the remarkable interview, and Miss Elmore was fortunate enough to see the seemingly disreputable visitor out of the house without her sister's knowledge of his having been there at all, unless Janet should choose to make some mention of the fact.

When she returned to Parsons's room, he was sitting up in bed, looking both anxious and disturbed, but by no means the invalid at death's door that he had seemed.

"Get me a little brandy and water," said he. "And then let us talk over the situation."

CHAPTER XLI.

A CONSULTATION OF THREE.

BEFORE going to keep his appointment with Susie Borden at her husband's bedside in the Presbyterian Hospital, for which there was yet time to spare, the detective proceeded to the nearest telegraph office.

He resolved to retain his present disguise throughout the remainder of the day, at all events, as the better to keep up the impression that he was no longer in New York.

Arrived at the telegraph office, he indited and sent off the following dispatch, in cipher, to the Cincinnati Chief of Police:

"In 'he autumn of 187—a young criminal, calling himself Albert Delaine, was arrested when about to be married to an estimable young lady of your city named Miss Fanny Elmore. His portrait is probably in your rogues' gallery. Please send me as minute and accurate a verbal description of it as possible, using this cipher, without unnecessary delay. Answer now while I wait."

FALCONBRIDGE."

The preliminary answer was returned in half an hour, to the following effect:

"Remember the Delaine case perfectly. Have just sent portrait by post, and you ought to get it by early mail to-morrow morning. In the mean time, will hunt up some one of the force who remembers the fellow's personal appearance better than I, and have the verbal description telegraphed, according to request, at very earliest moment."

Not quite so satisfied as he might have been, the detective then went to keep his appointment at the hospital.

As may well be believed, both Susie and her husband were becomingly astonished at seeing him present himself in the unexpected transformation that has been described, and yet more so when he set forth the new facts and revelations that had led up to its adoption.

Hal, who was now able to sit up in an invalid's chair for the greater part of the day, could scarcely contain himself for indignation and amazement.

"To think of my having been chumming it with a thieves' fence for all these many months, without suspecting it!" he exclaimed. "Oh, it is monstrous! And yet now I recall many things, heretofore unheeded, which should have at least vaguely warned me against the fellow. His reticence as to his career between our school-days and our coming together again in manhood; the mystery which he preserved as to the source of his income; his exceptionally free-and-easy opinions with regard to morality or the lack of it in men and women—but oh! what good to recapitulate my own dumb-headedness in detail? And Fanny! Why, curse the woman! She must have been his confidante and confederate from the outset. And in my own house, too—and both of them in league or intimacy with that fibbertygibbet she-devil who borrowed my faithful wife's semblance in which to attempt my assassination for a purely, basely mercenary end—my God! if the truth of these things was not before me, they would be incredible!"

He struck the arm of his chair with his wasted hand, and then fell back, temporarily exhausted.

"It is hard, but you must not give way to passion, my dear Hal," were Susie's soothing words as she laid her hand caressingly on his. "We are confronted by the facts, let us oppose them with calmness, hideous as they are."

"Your wife is right, old fellow," interposed Falconbridge. "Nothing can be gained except by coolness and patience. Besides, we have but little longer to wait. To-morrow must tell the tale."

"You think Fanny and the infernal Unknown will be on the dock, then, ready to start for Europe?" cried Borden, eagerly.

"Undoubtedly. The passages are engaged and paid for."

"But your visit of this morning, in the crook's character, will not have forced a change of plan on the part of Fanny and Parsons, you think?"

"Their plan will not be changed; I am sure of that. And I hope Miss Elmore," with a glance at Susie, "will not be permitted to suspect that her designs are suspected."

"She shall not be interfered with in the least," replied Susie, reassuringly. "I see the importance of that."

"I am glad you do. For her unimpeded action in carrying out this plot to escape in the Unknown's company will be my only chance of establishing the latter's identity, and get her, no less than the stolen money, in my clutches."

"That stands to reason," Borden observed. "What an absolutely impenetrable mystery so far! Have you no new theory, major, as to whom and what the adventuress may prove to be?"

Falconbridge reflected before replying. For prudential reasons of his own he did not wish to allude to the information he had sought and was hoping to receive in season from Cincinnati. And then his meeting with the engaging criminal, Lucy Windham, that morning, together with the suggestions it had given rise to, recurred to him with fresh force at this moment.

He accordingly mentioned the last-named incident, for what it might be worth.

"What!" cried Hal, while Susie was no less interested, "you noted in this woman the peculiarity of walk that has so often struck you as a characteristic of the fiendish masquerader?"

"Yes; or something very nearly like it," replied the detective, slowly.

"And she might, in general appearance, have personated Susie?"

"I am nearly but not quite certain that she might, the requisite facilities being accorded her."

"But is she bold and desperate enough to have carried out the role thus far, with the crime that has become associated with it?"

"Without a doubt. There is no uncertainty on that score. Fighting Luce is a dare-devil to the core."

Borden clapped his hands together enthusiastically.

"Why seek further, my dear Falconbridge?" he cried, jubilantly. "Your mystery is solved,

your Unknown found! Gad! and, do you know, I'm glad it turns out not to have been Fanny herself? Much as I must detest the woman hereafter, I could never forget that she was Susie's sister."

The tears came into Mrs. Borden's eyes, but she concealed them from her husband.

"Heaven grant," she murmured, "that this may prove the solution of the mystery at last!"

"Oh, it must!" exclaimed Hal. "No more doubt, no more entanglements. This adventuress shoplifter is the Protean she-devil, and no mistake!"

"Hold on!" interposed the detective. "I really can't conscientiously permit you to accept this way out of the difficulty so unreservedly, even if I must throw something of a dampener on all this enthusiasm."

"Oh, you're entirely too pessimistic, old fellow!"

"Not by any means; but possibility is not probability; and while there is a possibility of Lucy Windham proving identical with the masquerading Unknown, there are various reasons to be urged against the probability of such a thing."

"But what are they? Come, now!"

"Well, in the first place, she has most likely never seen your wife, at least to know who she was, and therefore could not have had her as her model for imitation."

"But could not Parsons have coached the woman, or pointed out Susie to her? I am prepared to believe any blackness of that scoundrel now. Come; could not this have been done?"

"Possibly, yes."

"Oh, you're cornered! Well, your *firstly* being disposed of, now for your *secondly*!"

Falconbridge could not but smile at this self-satisfying exuberance.

"Secondly, then," he went on, "I have my doubts as to whether the woman under discussion has any acquaintance with Parsons either. She has never, to my knowledge, been a member of the 'gang,' at all events."

"But how easy for her to have joined 'em recently, without even you being the wiser! Trust me, major," with renewed cheerfulness, "you have hit upon the heart of the mystery at last."

The detective finally resolved to leave Borden in the blissful belief that had taken possession of him, without any further opposition.

But this was hardly done before a new cloud gathered upon the convalescent's face.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CONSULTATION CONTINUED.

"THERE is one thing I can't exactly understand in this affair," exclaimed Borden, after a thoughtful knitting of the brows.

Both his wife and the detective looked up expectantly.

"What," continued the messenger, "shall this rascal, Parsons, do after being deserted by Fanny to-morrow, in furtherance of her scheme to abscond with the Unknown—as we will continue to call the creature as a matter of form?"

"Pars ns will have doubtless by that time made up his mind to take himself, or have some one else take him, off to some hospital, in order that he may put in condition to follow the fugitives as soon as practicable. That is probably his intention."

"He shall go out of my house to-morrow, in any case!" cried Susie, decisively. "I sha'n't have him there another hour after that—unless it should prove really dangerous to remove him, as a matter of course."

"Certainly," observed the detective, "the man has the aspect of being all but at death's door."

"But look here!" again cried Borden. "Why does he send off the women in this summary fashion, after all?"

"That is easily accounted for," explained Falconbridge. "The pace is evidently growing too hot for the Unknown, without taking into account the suspicious restlessness of the 'gang' over the promised division of a portion of the stolen money, which, of course, it has never been the intention of Parsons to make."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. And yet—well, I only hope that neither Fanny nor her Unknown will take the alarm, that is all."

"I do not think that need be apprehended. Miss Elmore regards me as in Boston indefinitely on other business than this, and I do not believe she cares a snap of her finger for the threats of the gang."

"Still, if they should find her out on the steamship pier, and undertake to intercept the flight, wouldn't it complicate things for you?"

"Yes, but I shall take measures to prevent any such cross-purposes. Preacher Walsh and Rareton are safely out of sight till Sunday, in the first place; and I shall look out for the rest."

Borden knitted his brows.

"Could Fanny have been accessory to my attempted assassination before the fact?" he muttered between his set teeth.

"No!" cried Susie, eagerly. "In fact, I—I am sure she could not have been!"

There was a blush in her face, which the detective could understand and sympathize

with, and her husband looked at her searchingly.

"Why are you *sure*?" he demanded.

Her blush deepened, and she stammered in attempting a reply; but at last she straightened herself up with a brave and resolute expression.

"I will at last tell you frankly why I am sure of this, Hal," she said, with forced collectness. "In the first place, you will recollect that when I told you I had insisted on having Mr. Parsons's room, it was before this exposure of his being leagued with criminals was made apparent."

"Of course, I recollect that, my dear."

"Have you imagined my reasons, then, for giving him notice to quit?"

"No, your inclinations in the matter were sufficient for me."

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"It was because the scoundrel dared to be disrespectful to me—to make love to me!" And she bravely abstained from covering her face, though it was as crimson now.

Borden looked stunned at first, and then the wrath that found its way was too deep for violence.

"If I had only guessed, if I had only guessed!" he repeated, in a low, choking voice, his fingers working convulsively. "Ah, but patience! The Powers of vengeance may yet yield him up into my hands!"

Susie then described in a few words the memorable scene between Parsons and herself, which the detective was already familiar with.

"Now," she said, in conclusion, "long before and directly after that shameful scene, Fanny would hardly speak politely to Parsons, and, in her mad jealousy, she has not even abstained from quarreling with me on this account. Once she even accused me of stealing Parsons from her just as, she declared, I had stolen *you* from her, Hal, in our old love-making days. Of course, I could have speedily convinced her of the preposterousness of such a charge by merely reciting the outcome of my interview with the unprincipled scoundrel. But my pride and self-respect together kept me silent. Now, as Fanny has only since then renewed her *entente cordiale* with the man, it seems but fair to believe that she could not have been privy to his connection with the murderous Unknown before that time—her evil associations long anterior to that period to the contrary notwithstanding."

And then, having finished her disagreeable story thus heroically, Susie began to weep.

Her husband drew her gently to his side.

"Don't cry, dear!" he said, soothingly. "A hard, hard fortune you have had through these terrible complications, but brighter and happier days are at hand. I feel sure of this. And do not fret; your wayward sister shall have the full benefit of the doubt in her favor, to the utmost extent of your explanation."

"That is no more than right," Falconbridge suggested. "It is fairly logical that Miss Elmore could have no intimation of the Express-car crime before its commission. And I have my theory, too, as to how she has been gradually led into these fatal entanglements."

"Let us have your theory, major," said Borden. "In spite of my natural indignation against Fanny Elmore, I can't forget that she is Susie's sister, and anything that may palliate her faults will be welcome."

"My theory," continued the detective, "may not palliate or excuse so much as it will explain. It is this: In spite of her apparent coldness and self-control, Miss Elmore is essentially romantic and imaginative, with an emotional nature sadly in want of mental and moral restraint. Her first disappointment in love was such as to render her, under these conditions, disposed to finally invest it with a romantic atmosphere, of which she was the heroine and her unworthy lover a species of robber-knight taken in the toils, instead of regarding it in the more prosaic light of a most fortunate escape on her own part from permanent unhappiness and disgrace."

"From its first inception, this false and unwholesome sentiment has doubtless grown upon the woman, gradually coloring her entire world of secret thought and imagining with its pernicious hues."

"Her second love experience with you, Hal—for I mustn't mince matters, if I would make myself clear—was such as to strengthen indirectly these deplorable conditions."

"She could not have you, so she would plunge yet deeper into her dangerous glamour of the spirit and the conscience."

"To the perilous romanticism that had existed before was added a yet more perilous element—desperateness, a secret disregard of the conventionalities and scorn of the proprieties of social worth and standing."

"How was she first led into forming criminal acquaintances? That can only be vaguely surmised. Maybe it was through a revival of her first love, and a Quixotic determination to hunt him up amid the purlieus of vice and crime, for the purpose of effecting a reformation in his character. But this can be only guess-work."

"Once formed, or permitted, it is in the sub-

tle nature of vice that these associations should grow upon and perhaps secretly fascinate her more and more."

"Neither would I theorize as to the extent of her influence with these terrible associations, which must none the less be considerable. Both Raretton and Walsh, representatives of their class, allude to and address her as 'the Lady.' I should judge that she is both feared and respected by such persons in a manner that is decidedly unique, and not unmixed with a certain mystery that doubtless has its special charm for her; while even Parsons only alluded to her in my presence to-day, when supposing me as none other than Preacher Walsh, as 'the Lady.' Now you have my theory on this matter."

He had scarcely concluded when Susie sprung to her feet, exclaiming wildly. "My double again! See, it is she once more!" and darted away in a sort of frenzy.

At the same instant the two men perceived the Unknown, the mysterious woman, gliding out of sight, with that mocking, coquettish smile beneath the hem of her half veil.

CHAPTER XLIII. OLD FALCON'S LUCK.

THOUGH Susie Borden had rushed energetically in pursuit at her first intimation of the mysterious woman's presence on the opposite side of the hospital ward, the Falcon Detective had prudently abstained from following her example.

He had, indeed, remained quietly in his seat, which chanced to be directly behind a large Japanese screen, which had stood between him and the vanishing Unknown, compelling him to peer out from behind it for the parting glimpse of her which had been less obstructedly shared by Borden, from his reclining attitude in his invalid's chair.

Even when Susie returned, flushed and excited, from her unsuccessful pursuit, a few minutes later, Falconbridge still composedly remained partly behind the screen.

This naturally excited the curiosity of both Susie and her husband.

"Of course, it was no use, my chasing the fiendess!" she exclaimed, vexedly. "She just seemed to fade away from the foot of the main staircase, like a shape of mist, and then I was out in the crowded street, staring at nowhere like a fool."

"Good heavens! you should be thankful for it," cried Borden. "If you are not, I am for you, at all events. Have you forgotten Jake Gunter's fate?"

"That is nothing. If I had once laid hands on the creature, I would have clung there while life remained. But dear me, Mr. Falconbridge! how can you sit there so composedly over it all?"

"Strikes me as odd, too, major," said Borden. "You can't surely have lost interest in the she-devil who is the heart of all our mystery?"

The detective smiled.

"By no means," he calmly replied. "But observe, my friends! do you not remark this friendly Japanese screen?"

"Of course, we do," said Susie.

"Well, my friends, I admire this screen. It has just proved itself my luck—my mascot, as you might say."

"In what way?" was demanded.

"Do you not see that it must have interfered with the Unknown's glance in this direction as she flitted across the ward over yonder—in other words, that, in all probability, I alone escaped her passing regard?"

"Yes, very likely."

"How would it have been, then, if Frank Parsons, alias Mr. Franks, should receive word from the Unknown sooner or later that Preacher Walsh had only quitted conference with him and Miss Elmore to step right up here for a friendly chat with Mr. and Mrs. Borden?"

"Oh, I understand!" exclaimed Susie, while Hal nodded. "It might have ruined everything. How fortunate she did not see you!"

"You may well say that; especially as I myself am in Boston just now, while it is only Preacher Walsh, the veteran crook, who chances to be conversing with you at present. This seems to be my lucky day."

"What can be the object of the extraordinary creature thus risking so much?" observed Borden, "by an apparently wanton and unnecessary exhibition of herself in this public place?"

"Who can say? Perhaps, to complete our mystification, perhaps for an additional hoodwink, of which we can have no conception. But, if we are alert and secret, to-morrow ought to tell the tale."

The detective then took his departure, and proceeded to the Grand Central Depot, in order to keep his appointment with Tommy Dodd.

Arriving there, an unwonted excitement in one of the large waiting-rooms attracted his attention.

Its cause was no less unexpected and interesting.

Standing at bay in one corner of the saloon, towered the gaunt figure of Donald Brae, his preposterous two-handed sword describing glittering circles about his defiant head, while a clamorous knot of detectives, policemen and

railroad officials seemed very desirous of making him a prisoner, and yet equally careful to keep out of his weapon's mighty sweep.

"Come ain, come a'!" cheerily roared the Highlander. "It's my ain gude soord, that war baptized at Culloden, in readiness to welcome ye to hospitable graves. Hoot, ye roobers! will ye nae come on then w' sic a challenge flouted in your faces? Aweel, aweel! a' can hoold me ain this pass till Ben Nevis's white head topples intil the blue loch at his foot."

Falconbridge did not venture to interfere with an explanation of some sort in the unsophisticated giant's favor, by reason of his disguise, but at this instant Jim Latham, newly arrived upon the scene, interposed.

"Drop that absurd weapon, Donald, you fool!" he shouted. "They'll State-prison you before you know what you're about."

"Let them coom on, then, Maister Latham!" was the chivalric reply. "An' is it this wepon you'd ca' absord, mon? By the pibroch o' my feyther's hoose, could ye feel the weight o' the blade, ye might sing sma', Maister Latham!"

Here the latter felt a touch upon his arm, and turned to confront Falconbridge, whom his professional eye at once detected through his disguise, after receiving a significant sign.

"What has angered the Highlander?" asked the private detective.

One of the officials, overhearing the question, answered it.

"The fellow opened his coat at the ticket-window," he explained, "and his great sword inadvertently fell on the floor with a clang. The chaffing following upon the accident seemed to excite him to frenzy, and here he has been for the past five minutes, apparently spoiling for a fight with the entire metropolis."

Watching his chance, Latham here evaded a general sweep of the monstrous blade, and, darting expertly in, threw his arms about the Quixotic Highlander's neck.

"Donald, are you insane?" he exclaimed, earnestly. "What would Janet think to see you making such an ass of yourself?"

Here Donald was disarmed and overpowered by a simultaneous rush, and a little later was borne off to the station, roaring like a bull, and with two men following in the rear as bearers of the historic sword.

"I'll try and fix things for him," whispered Latham, to Falconbridge.

"I hope you can," responded the latter. "And the sooner the fellow is shipped back to his native heath, it will be the better for his health."

Here he for the first time perceived Tommy Dodd at his side, his face agrin as at a wake.

CHAPTER XLIV. FIGHTING LUCE.

"You didn't hear the whole explanation, boss," whispered the lad, "about the Sawnie dropping his big sword."

"What more is there to tell?" asked the detective.

"Well, you see, the Sawnie has, like enough, heard from Janet about Mrs. Borden's double to render him sort of expectant, you know."

"Very likely; but what has that to do with his last eccentricity?"

"While he was at the ticket-hole—like enough to ask if he couldn't buy a passage to Dundee or John o' Groat's House—he saw the Double pass almost at his elbow, that is all."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, my liege. And it was doubtless his sight of the apparition that caused him to drop the sword of his 'feyther's' all over the room. You'd have thought a junk-shop had bu'sted by the clang and rattle of it."

"Where were you at the time?"

"At the other end of the saloon. Before I could run up, the woman had mixed with the crowd and disappeared."

"Come along! A mention of this will assist Latham in getting Donald out of his quandary."

They hurried away together, and Tommy, running on ahead as the police station was approached, came back with the information that Donald had been forthwith sent before the Yorkville Court, after a brief consideration of his extraordinary case by the sergeant in charge.

They then proceeded to the court, which was not far distant.

It was only then that the detective recollected his disguise, and what was due to its preservation; but, for all that, he entered the court-room with Tommy, now more intent than ever on seeing the upshot of Donald's dilemma.

The place was crowded with amused spectators, while Donald's towering and gaunt form was already confronting the bench, his sanguinary heirloom from Culloden being propped up against a pillar near at hand.

Latham was at his side, and the justice was evidently trying hard to keep his countenance under a frowning and dignified aspect.

"So, Mr. Donald Brae, of Glen Eachin," the justice was demanding, in his most pompous manner, "you evidently think it one of the customs of the new land in which you find yourself—to thus make an exhibition of your valor, Claymore in hand, to the serious disturbance of the public peace?"

"Noo, your Majesty," Donald replied, bewild-

eredly. "My gude sword droppit oot o' my waistcoat, an' they a' flouted me beyond foobairance."

"What caused you to drop it?"

"I saw a ghost, your Highness."

"A ghost! what, at the ticket window?"

"It is ower true, your Raiverence."

And then Donald went on to describe the manner of his amazement, which Latham proceeded to make comprehensible to the judicial understanding.

"Oh, this will never do!" interrupted the justice at last. "Mr. Brae, I must consider a charge against you of carrying concealed weapons upon the person."

"Is it againg the law, your Majesty," exclaimed Donald, in genuine surprise, "for a Hie-lain man to bear wi' him the gude soord o' his ancestors?"

"Yes, my friend, when concealed upon the person. However, your case presents some mitigating features. If you will demonstrate to the court how you ever did manage to conceal that particular weapon upon your person, a somewhat lenient view may be taken of your case."

Donald's great florid face lighted up joyously.

"That a' wull, and wi' pleasure, your Majesty!" he cried, seizing the claymore as it was passed to him by the attendants.

"You will no longer address the court as 'your Majesty,'" rebuked the justice. "The majesty of the law is present, but that is all."

"I am hoombly at your Raiverence's sairvice. But—" Donald had come to a reflective pause, with his hands upon the vast hilt of the weapon, while his eyes dwelt rapturously along the surface of the great blade—"w'u'dn't your Raiverence joost like to see how a' can make the lichtnings o' heaven play around my head wi' the sweep an' gleeter o' the gude soord?"

"Do as the court orders, or it will be the worse for you!" thundered the justice, who was with difficulty keeping from laughing. "Do you want to be committed for contempt of court, sir?"

"Containt o' coort!" echoed the Highlander, in an appalled tone. "God forbid, your Highness, that a' should show ainy containt that a' might feel for the coort, an' your Raiverence into the bairgain!"

"Silence, sir! Demonstrate at once to the court how you manage to conceal that weapon upon your person."

Without more ado, the Highlander opened his expansive waistcoat, and took the sword of his fathers to his breast.

This he managed to do by bestowing the great hilt in some mysterious way up behind his shoulder blade so that the knob at its top came within an inch of the back of his head, the blade in the mean time being disposed down his left side and leg to within about the same distance of the bottom of his long frieze ulster.

Then, after laboriously buttoning up all the garments around his length, breadth and thickness, the concealment was finally effected.

The spectators roared with laughter, in which the judge was at last compelled to join, after which the wild Highlander was dismissed, with a caution, and took his departure with Special Officer Latham, who agreed to be responsible for his future good behavior.

While passing out of the entrance, however, with the curious crowd surging around him, he suddenly recoiled.

"Look!" he shouted. "The ghost! the ghost! Bring out his Raiverence, that he may see it a' wi' his ain een!"

It was, indeed, as he declared, though the crowd at large, in following the direction of his pointing hand, only caught a glimpse of what appeared as a very pretty woman, the upper part of whose face was concealed by a coquettish veil, flitting trippingly along before them, and then she had somehow disappeared, after throwing amused glances up the thronged steps.

Falconbridge and Tommy Dodd had also caught a glimpse of the apparition, but before they could elbow their way to the front, she was gone.

"By Jingo, boss!" exclaimed Tommy, in a low voice; "doesn't it just beat the Dutch?"

"Come along," returned his companion. "I must not linger over long about here in my present make-up."

But on turning the adjoining corner, after extricating themselves from the crowd, who were still bent on having fun out of Donald Brae, a pleasant voice said:

"What, you again, Preacher?" and Falconbridge found himself for the second time that day confronted, and rather mysteriously at that, by the handsome adventuress, Lucy Windham.

He looked her over critically.

Her street attire sufficiently resembled that habitually worn by Susie Borden to render her management of the personation possible, albeit she wore no veil.

"Yes, it's I again, Lucy," he responded. "But where are you just from?"

It struck him that there was some confusion in her reply, which was to the effect that she had been looking through some of the Third avenue shops.

"You are sure you were in the Yorkville Court room within ten minutes?" he demanded.

"Of course I am sure of it, Preacher!" responded the young woman, thoroughly self-possessed again. "Am I the sort to attend beaks' courts for amusement, you fool? But what are *you* doing, Preacher, in company with Old Falcon's little man Friday?" And she looked curiously at Tommy.

"My master wants him, Fighting Luce, that's what's the matter!" cried Tommy, promptly coming to his principal's rescue.

"Ah, Indeed!" and the adventuress patronizingly tapped him under the chin with her parasol-tip. "And where may your master be, my dear little man?"

"What do you want to know for, Luce, when I haven't said that he wants *you*?" was the boy's familiar reply.

"Ta, ta! And mightn't I have a general interest in Major Falconbridge's welfare, you little fraud?"

"Yes, you might, but you don't!"

"Tommy, you are growing fast. Go hide yourself on a toy counter, and I'll 'lift' you just for luck. I've been wanting a pocket-piece for a week."

"You might scratch your fingers in the job, Luce, light as they are."

"Are you going to tell me where your master is, you little wart?"

"He's in Boston."

"What can he be doing in Boston?"

"Eating beans, perhaps."

"Just think of Old Falcon expecting me to go to Boston to him on short notice, Lucy!" here interposed the pretended crook. "I just can't do it, and yet I daren't disobey on account of that old job he can put me in for at any moment he chooses."

"Take me for a drink somewhere, Preacher, and you can tell me all about it. I am that thirsty that even a glass of beer would be better than nothing."

A few moments later the trio were in the cabinet, or room, of an adjoining saloon, with refreshments before them.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CABINET MEETING.

"Just bear with me a few minutes, my friends," quietly remarked Miss Windham, when she had emptied her glass. "I might as well make myself comfortable while I have the chance."

With that, after satisfying herself that the privacy of the drinking saloon cabinet was not likely to be disturbed, she coolly took from under her dress-skirt a large, wide-mouthed secret pocket, or sack, which was full to bursting with miscellaneous shoplifting plunder from various unfortunate establishments.

"You see, there is nothing like system in all things, Preacher," she philosophically observed, while assorting and packing in convenient compass the contents of the bag with much expertness. "I must have more room, you know, if I am not going to be content with half-a-day's work."

They watched her curiously as she emptied the sack, and then, procuring a folded sheet of neat hardware paper, proceeded to make a neat package of the various articles, which seemed to include almost everything—handkerchiefs, fans, pocketbooks, children's and women's fine underwear, tooth-brushes, perfumery, *bric-a-brac*, laces, combs, rolled gold jewelry, hairpins, and many other samples of her peculiar industry entirely too numerous for particularization.

Tommy grinned, while his companion put on a look of admiration.

"By Jupiter! but you are a stunner, Luce, and no mistake," continued the latter.

"Ain't I, though?" was the shoplifter's smiling reply, though without looking up from her employment. "I suppose you would like to marry me, but I'm not exactly on the pal-for-life racket of late."

The detective picked up a pretty black half-vail from the heap.

"Do you ever wear this sort of thing, Luce?" he queried.

"Never," composedly. "Give it me. Thanks! Am I so homely then, Preacher, that I should want to hide a square inch of my face?"

"Not much, my dear. But aren't you afraid to make these arrangements in the presence of Falconbridge's little good man Friday?"

"Afraid of exhibiting my purchases?" with an elevation of her pretty brows. "By no means, my dear; and, moreover, the major and I are old friends. Tommy, my love, get me a string of the bartender."

This being done, and the package of plunder completed, Miss Windham ordered some more drinks, returned her professional pocket to the inside of her skirt, summoned a district messenger lad, and sent off the fruits of her industry to her residence-address, with a charming little sigh of relief, such as some thrifty and far-sighted young housewife might have indulged in over the successful completion of some arduous domestic task.

"What time is it, Mr. Walsh?" she asked, while stirring up her favorite decoction with much daintiness.

"Two o'clock, my dear," was the rather impatient response.

If the truth must be told, the detective was not in the most amiable humor. He had really permitted himself to build somewhat on the possibility of this cheerful representative of feminine criminality proving to be Susie Borden's mysterious double; and now that, upon closer scrutiny, the inadmissibility of such an hypothesis became conclusive to his understanding, he was correspondingly despondent for the time being.

However, something might still be obtained from the woman in the way of chance information or suggestion.

"My dear Preacher, I'll permit you to order me a bunch of cigarettes, if you should insist upon it," continued Lucy, sipping at her glass.

"Thanks!" as Tommy signified his willingness to go for the cigarettes, and was sent accordingly. "Do you know, I really think I'll call it a full day, and not do any more shopping. I really have some consideration for the clerks, you see," with a smile.

"Perhaps more than for the proprietors," was the rather ungallant response.

"Now, Preacher, that is the most unkindest cut of all!" shaking her pretty forefinger at him with mock severity. "But here are my cigarettes at last," taking the bunch, which Tommy had just returned with, and lighting one. "And Mr. Dodd, my toy angel, if you will signify our renewed aridity to the barkeep, I shall be obliged."

This being done, and the glasses forthwith replenished, Miss Windham turned to her elder companion with quite a decided air.

"Now I'll hear you, my dear Preacher," she said, the cigarette between her finger-tips, a wreath of smoke curling gracefully from her pretty lips.

"Hear me as to what, Luce?"

"As to your general grumpiness, of course. Don't deny that you are grumpy, for I am not to be deceived. Now, what is it? I don't forget that you were in love with me two years ago, either; but there is no emotional regret in your present discouragement, or you would have attempted to kiss me before this. But what is it? That is what I want to know."

The pretended crook laughed.

"Well, to tell the truth, Luce," said he, "I'm mystified."

"What about?"

"You've probably read the sensational reports about the mysterious, unidentifiable woman who knifed the Express messenger, and got away with a money-package?"

"Who hasn't?"

"Well, our gang is just wild to know who she is, and I can't help 'em out. That's what troubles me."

"Oho!" And Miss Windham grew thoughtful.

"What do you think of it, Luce?"

"Well, I've thought of it a good deal. That woman is a trump card, Preacher! But there's one thing that even the fly-cops seem to have overlooked."

"What is that?"

"The possibility of the woman being a stall."

"A stall?"

"Yes; that is, not the actual operator at all, but only a clever dodge to distract attention from the real business man—for a man, more likely than a woman, put up and carried through that job."

"You really incline to this theory yourself, Lucy?"

"Yes; so far as I care to have any theory outside of my own private affairs."

"But let's have your views."

"Cheerfully, my friend. Well, in the first place that wasn't a woman's job. It has the artistic, but not the conclusive, feminine stamp. It was too desperate and violent for woman's work. The subsequent mystery points the same way. The real operator wouldn't dare risk the masquerading that has been indulged in. There is but one lady in New York," reflectively, "with the requisite boldness and finesse for having carried through that job unassisted."

"Who is that?" demanded the disguised detective, eagerly.

"Well," mysteriously, "a woman of my occasional acquaintance."

"Can't you tell me her name?" impatiently.

"Of course; for I am quite positive she would not object."

"Who is it?"

"Miss Lucy Windham."

And then she burst into a peal of laughter, merry and light as a school-girl's, over her joke; while Master Dodd was so tickled that he ordered a fresh round at his individual expense.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the detective, good-humoredly accepting the situation; "I might have known you meant yourself."

"And why not, my dear Preacher?"

"Oh, have your laugh, Lucy. And to show you how little I think you out of the way in your self-estimate, I have only got to tell you that I have really had you in my mind as possibly the mysterious masquerader herself."

"Go along, Preacher! you don't mean it?"

"On my honor, Lucy! Isn't it true, Tommy Dodd?"

"The gospel truth!" corroborated the little

man. "The Preacher has really been having it for you, ma'm."

All this seemed to strike Miss Windham as excruciatingly funny.

She laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, and then nothing would do but that the 'Preacher' should give her the inner history of his having come to honor her with such a suspicion.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LUCY SOMEWHAT MYSTIFIES THE DETECTIVE.

WHEN the *pseudo* Preacher Walsh had complied with Fighting Luce's demands with regard to the masquerading mystery, from the 'crook' point of view, that decidedly original young woman gave him a keenly observant look.

"So the gang at first suspected the Lady herself as being the flitter in this case, eh?" she said.

"We did and we did not, was the reply. 'You see, Luce, we thought her deep enough for the job, but with hardly enough sand.'

The shoplifter's lip curled.

"So! as if you or any of 'em knew anything about the Lady!" she exclaimed. "Good God!" with sudden fury; "how I hate that woman!"

"What! Miss Elmore?"

"Yes. How is she any better than I?" fiercely. "I am a thief, and pretend to be nothing better. And yet she, forsooth, is the Lady—Lady with a big L—before whom you all cringe and shuffle and are awe-struck, is if in the presence of some sort of Diana, 'chaste as the icicle,' what's the rest of it? It's from Shakespeare, anyway, and you once told me you had started in as a play-actor, before swell-mobbing."

"Ah! I think I remember the lines you allude to. They are from Coriolanus." And the detective quoted accordingly:

"The moon of Rome! Chaste as the icicle
That's curded by the frost from purest snow
And hangs on Dian's temple."

"That will do, my dear!" and Lucy nodded approvingly, but at the same time sarcastically. "The idea! How is that woman really any better than I, pray?"

"Nobody has claimed that she is, that I am aware of."

"But she can know your gang, and even associate with 'em, if not fence 'for 'em occasionally, and yet she can still hold up her head with the church-goers, and all of you look on her as a sort of goddess in dimity and shoe-leather!"

The proxy of Mr. Preacher Walsh smiled deprecatingly.

"My dear Lucy, what has this got to do with it?" he suavely said. "The Lady is simply out of the question, although she, no less than Franks, knows who the Mystery is."

"How do you know she isn't the Mystery herself? She has got the necessary sand, for that matter; you're out there."

"Well, the Mystery has been spotted, while the Lady was one of the lookers-on."

"Oh!"

"Pretty conclusive, eh?"

"Yes, Preacher, but don't crow. I was only claiming the Lady's capability in the matter; not that I supposed her for a minute the Mystery herself."

"What do you think, then?"

"That the job was done, not by a woman, but by a man—what I hinted before. Mark my words to that effect!"

"And that the Mystery is nothing more than a stall?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can't agree with you, my dear. Should the mysterious woman be nabbed—by the cops, you know—they wouldn't have to go much further to have the real operator in limbo."

"True; very little further, if at all, my dear Preacher."

"But what the deuce do you mean, Lucy? You as much as say that the woman is the criminal, and almost in the same breath declare that it's a man that did the job."

"Seemingly inconsistent, eh?"

"I should say so."

"And you can't see how I can still be right without contradicting myself?"

"No, I can't."

"Then I sha'n't enlighten you. Now mark my last words, Preacher, and then I'm done with the matter. A man performed this swell job, and yet when they catch the masquerading woman the man will be virtually in quod."

"But this is nonsense!"

"Is it? Let it remain as such, then. But you will yet understand and indorse what I mean. Now, my dear Preacher, I'll take a parting drink at your expense. Then I shall try just two or three more dandy stores on Sixth avenue and call it a day's work well done."

"But I thought you were through 'shopping' for the day, Lucy."

Miss Windham looked a little pensive, and then smiled softly.

"Ah, my dear Preacher," she replied, with an arch look, "but there are two hours remaining of a delightfully pleasant afternoon, and when did a lady ever withstand the shopping-fascination under such circumstances. Besides, there

are just some charming new-style goods down at Ehrich's that I must select from."

So the farewell refreshment was indulged in accordingly, and "airy fairy" Miss Lucy Windham went on her smiling way.

"Boss," observed Tommy Dodd, as they were proceeding to the telegraph-station where Falconbridge hoped that by this time the verbal description telegraphed for might be awaiting him from Cincinnati, "Luce is just a high roller, and no mistake, isn't she?"

"Yes, my son," replied the detective, abstractedly, "but like all high-rollers, she is liable at any moment to roll down-hill—in other words, to get to the end of her rope."

A fresh disappointment was awaiting the detective at the telegraph-station.

Not that the anticipated verbal description in cipher was not at hand, for it was; but it had been dispatched by a man to whom the graphic faculty had been essentially denied, and was, therefore, of little or no account whatever.

It was unconscionably long and prodigiously mixed, leaving the reader about as well informed with regard to Miss Elmore's criminal first lover's personal appearance as if the description of a new system of architecture had been attempted in lieu of any particular member of the genus homo.

"I shall have to wait for the photograph by mail," muttered Falconbridge, tearing up the dispatch, after trying in vain to make something intelligible out of it. "There seems to be no help for it. Come, Tommy; we'll get something to eat by way of a change."

Nine o'clock of the ensuing evening found them once more, and, as the detective hoped, for the last time at their post of secret observation before the Borden cottage.

Miss Fanny was out and in several times, and there were other suggestions to the effect that she might be quietly preparing for her contemplated surreptitious voyage in company with the Unknown.

But of the latter there was not another sign.

However, as it wouldn't at all be likely that Fanny would venture to be joined at the house by her mysterious traveling companion, Falconbridge had about made up his mind that the steamship pier would be the only place at which he might intercept them.

Would Fanny enact the principal or minor role in the projected combination of "Mrs. Mountjoy and Maid," as booked for the voyage?

Even this could only be conjectured.

However, shortly before ten o'clock, Mrs. Borden herself came out of the cottage, with a general air of desiring an interview, and, leaving Tommy on guard, the disguised detective lost no time in overtaking her as she moved off slowly in the direction of the Park.

"Fanny is making her preparations," were Susie's first words.

"I judged as much," replied the detective. "Will she be likely to take a great deal of baggage, do you think?"

"All she has, I presume. Fan is not the one to seek a foreign shore unprovided in the way of wardrobe. She has three large trunks, and is secretly rejoiced, no doubt, at being informed by me that I shall be at the hospital before nine in the morning to remain with Hal until his transfer to his own home, two hours later. This will afford her ample time in which to give me the slip, as I understand that the steamer does not sail before eleven."

Here they withdrew to one side to permit two men to pass who were conversing very earnestly, and who were recognized as Jim Latham and Donald Brae.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE HIGHLANDER'S FAREWELL.

FALCONBRIDGE related to his companion, to her no little amusement, the Highlander's experience in the railroad waiting-room and subsequently before the police magistrate.

"I presume," he said, in conclusion, "that Latham is now using his best arguments to induce Janet's picturesque kinsman to return to his native heather with the least possible delay, and it is to be hoped that he will succeed. We are altogether too prosaic on this side the herring pond to appreciate the historic claymore of Culloden at its true worth, I am afraid."

This surmise proved to be correct, for when they reached the Park wall they were fortunate enough to be the silent witnesses of another interview between Donald and Latham, who occupied the same bench as upon the former occasion, and were presently once more joined by Janet Douglas.

"Ah!" commented Susie, in a low voice; "this explains Janet's nervousness throughout this evening. It is doubtless to be the Highlander's Farewell."

And so it was.

"Oh, my dear kinsman!" cried Janet, rushing impulsively into Donald's outstretched arms; "and are you really ganging back to Scotland, after being in America less than a month?"

Donald imprinted a kiss on the chaste forehead of the young girl, and then bowed his head upon his great breast.

"Yes, Janet," he replied. "I ha'e permitted Maister Latham to over-persuade me to that eend."

"And when do you go, and what steamer do you take, Donald, dear?"

"The morrow's sun wull see me on the gratt blue say, Janet, ma bonnie cousin, an' the Aurania is the vessel wull bear me hence."

"Well, you must try and cheer up, old fel-low!" interposed Latham, heartily. "A good voyage is doubtless before you, and you'll soon forget your unpleasant experiences in this country when once more back amid your beloved Highlands."

But a great and sentimental melancholy seemed resting temporarily on the Highland man's proud and untamable spirit.

"They may nae mair be the same to me, Jamie, after ma trials and adventures in these foreign parts," he replied, mournfully. "The breath o' the heather is sweet, ma frien', an' bonny is the music o' the lavrock when a-wing, but the insults that a' ha'e boorne in this country canna be sae lightly forgotten."

"Oh, you must nae think thus, Donald!" cried Janet, soothingly. "They ha'e nae been able to appreciate you, dear mon, that is a'."

Donald made a grand motion toward opening the front of his ulster, but was hastily prevented by Latham's hand upon his arm.

"Don't do it!" cried the latter, half-angrily. "By Saint Andrew! if you attempt to produce that infernal arch-angel's sword again this side your native shore, I shall have nothing more to do with you, Donald! And I sha'n't let Janet ever mention your name again."

"Nae in violence, but only in fareweel, ma frien'," pleaded the Caledonian. "A true Highlander canna bid his fareweel wi'out upon his ain gudd Soord, mon, especially when that soord—"

"Yes, yes!" testily; "especially when it was at Culloden and the Lord only knows where else. Blast your unsophisticated Scotch hide! you haven't got any more common sense than a bag of oatmeal."

"Ma frien'," with a grand and towering dignity, "your being the true love o' ma fair kinswoman excuses you in this instance."

"Do let him say his fareweel on his soord, Jamie!" interceded Janet. "I know he wull nee be violent again. You'll promise that, won't you, Donald, dear?"

Donald bowed gravely.

"Nae mair o' that, ma lass," he responded. "A fareweel on the gudd soord's hilt as a' removed frae violence."

"Go ahead, then!" and Latham threw up his hands in unmitigated disgust. "If the blasted lunkhead gets into trouble again, he may get out of it without my aid as best he can."

Donald Brae once more controlled the fierce wrath that might otherwise have been evoked by these injurious words.

Then, at a swift gesture, open came the vast length of ulster-front, and once more gleamed the giant brand in the dim light.

Donald solemnly raised it with both hands and kissed the hilt, after which he pointed slowly with it to the four cardinal points of the compass.

Then, falling upon one knee, he caressed the great weapon, his voice growing husky and pathetic as he proceeded to speak his fareweel.

"Farewell, America, farewell!" he murmured, pressing his lips again to the sword between the words. "Bonny and bright is your beauty, but nae to compare wi' Scotia's rugged hills, wi' the green glens a-tween, an' the mists creepin' along the jags, when the loch is blue in the vale. But bonny and fair art thou, America, after your ain fashing, an' thus doth Donald Brae, the last stalwart scion o' Clan Eachin, gie you his last fareweel!"

Then Donald arose, heedless of Latham's contemptuous look, and, yielding to the overpowering passion of the moment, was beginning to make the sword whistle around his head when a guardian of the night, one of the gray uniformed officers of the Park, who had been secretly watching the strange scene from not far away, suddenly dashed in upon him, club in hand, and grasped him by the collar.

"What d'ye mane by it, ye spaldeen?" cried the guardian, threateningly. "Is it loony or blind, b'ilin' drunk that ye air, with disturbin' the pace in this unsamely manner?"

Mr. Brae, who had come to have a thorough respect for the officers of the law in even despised America, tried to explain, but to very little purpose, while Latham unconcernedly looked on, with his hands in his pockets, deaf to Janet's appeals for his interference once more in her kinsman's favor.

"Not I," he replied, doggedly. "I gave the bull-headed jackass due warning, and now, if he wants claymore exercise, he can continue it in a precinct cooling-box, for all I care, with a broadsword dance into the bargain."

However, he presently relented so far as to make such representations as were needed to placate the indignant guardian, and Donald was permitted to go with a caution.

"A' shall feel a weel bit mair mysel'," remarked Mr. Brae, as he once more effected the

surprising feat of concealing his sword upon his person, "when a' tread the deck o' the gude ship, wi' the salt water under ma heels."

"I should think you would," growled Latham, leading the way out of the Park, "and if you could pickle yourself in a barrel or two of the briny in the mean time, it would do you good. For that is what you most require, Sawnie—salt, and piled on thick, too!"

"Heck, mon! don't be fashed. Ma fareweel is said, an' that is a' there is about it."

A little later on, Susie and Falconbridge separated, the former returning to her house before Janet made her appearance, with red eyes and wet cheeks, as indications that her parting with her troublesome kinsman had cost her some emotional suffering, which was perhaps more than he was worth.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE STEAMSHIP PIER.

FALCONBRIDGE and Tommy Dodd knocked off from their watch upon the Borden house that night at twelve o'clock, as there seemed to be nothing further to justify it, and at eight o'clock on the following morning were on their way to the steamship pier, where final and conclusive developments were hoped for with the liveliest anticipations.

The former had changed his disguise, and was now in the fictitious character of a rather dudish appearing gentleman of leisure, such as might naturally be on hand to wish a *bon voyage* to some fashionable lady or popular actress about to seek the ocean passage in the Aurania.

Tommy Dodd, for whom a disguise had also been thought desirable, was, on the other hand, got up regardless of expense as his companion's groom or "tiger," what there was of him appearing to a decided advantage in a dark blue livery, nattily trimmed, with top boots and a glazed dicer that suggested a French postillion in an Opera Beufle.

"We shall have ample time," said Falconbridge, "to stop at the post-office for that photograph that I am expecting from Cincinnati."

"May I ask you, boss," inquired Tommy, "what you expect to learn by the portrait you are looking for?"

"That is almost a conundrum as yet to my own mind, Tommy," was the evasive reply. "I hardly expect anything, but have only a vague hope of something."

"Thank you kindly, my liege lord!" Tommy Dodd urbanely rejoined. "It's really a treat to make an inquiry that receives such instant and complete satisfaction, and you have my acknowledgments, though you might hit one of your own size, as the nail said to the sledge-hammer."

"Don't mention it, my son; the courtesy was not a violent wrench upon my amiability."

They were passing down Broadway on foot, and were attracted by a commotion in front of the palatial dry-goods establishment of Denning & Co. (formerly that of A. T. Stewart & Co.), where, early as was the hour, it seemed that a notorious shoplifter, caught in the practice of her nefarious profession, was being handed over to a policeman by the private detectives of the place.

Our friends had just time to learn this much when the knot of curiosity-seekers at the entrance parted to make way for the egress of the officer and his comely, richly-dressed, and, of course, virtuously indignant prisoner.

"My eye!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, under his breath; "if it ain't Fighting Luce, I'm Barnum's giant!"

"Humph!" muttered his companion, in response. "I wasn't far from wrong, eh, as to your light-rollers occasionally rolling once too often!"

And then as the officer, still retaining his grasp upon his prisoner's arm, leaned forward, with extended club, to order back the crowd, Falconbridge managed to get a whisper into her ear, which caused her to look up quickly, with a swift, cunning expression.

"Oh, Mr. Vanderbilt, I am that rejoiced to see you, that I can't contain myself!" she exclaimed, with exuberant piteousness. "What a position for a lady of my character to find herself in! Here you, Mr. Officer, this gentleman, Mr. Plantaganet Vanderbilt—whose name will be a sufficient guarantee, I suppose," with ironical deference—"will assure you that some deplorable mistake is being made in this affair."

The policeman turned with a somewhat bewildered look, which was amply reflected by the store attendants, two of whom were bringing up the rear, one of them quite loaded down with handkerchiefs, laces, fine stockings, and miscellaneous articles of which Miss Windham had been unceremoniously relieved in the searchroom of the establishment not ten minutes before, while the crowd grew sympathetic and interested.

The Mr. Plantaganet Vanderbilt thus pathetically appealed to, in other words, our fashionably-disguised detective, smiled, while his equerry-appearing companion broke into a grin of the broad-gauge variety.

"Does the lady really know you, sir?" demanded one of the attendants.

"Not in the character she would have me appear, my friend, most certainly," was the detective's bland response. "But that doesn't prevent my sincere regret for her present predicament—a hard one, indeed, even for Lucy Windham, the widely-acknowledged boss counter-thief and shoplifter of the light-fingered fraternity."

"Come on, m'am!"

And the official peremptoriness was resumed without any ceremony.

"The devil fly away with you for a scab and a sucker!" Miss Windham sweetly remarked, with a gilt-edged epithet to the last scion of the Plantaganet Vanderbilt stock, as she followed her captor without any further protest. "You a gentleman, you dead-beat of a one-horse detective! Why, there isn't a real gent of my honorable acquaintance that would wipe his feet on your whiskers!" And she forthwith flounced away to prison, amid the jeers and laughter of the onlookers.

"It is really sad about Lucy," philosophically commented Falconbridge, resuming his way. "I know her for as likely and honest a ship-carpenter's daughter as ever lived, when the idea of evil associations had never entered her pretty head, and she is good for a five years' sentence, as an old offender. So runs the world away!"

"'Tis even so, gossip," sagely responded his little companion. "The question is not so much, 'Under what king, Bezonian?' as 'Where will you land when you once get going?' And the lesson of vice is an over true tale."

There were a number of epistles awaiting Falconbridge in the post office lock-box, but not the coveted one containing the photo of Fanny Elmore's criminal first lover.

There was nothing for it then but to leave Tommy Dodd in waiting for the next Cincinnati mail, and to proceed to the steamship dock alone.

It was a full hour yet before the hour for sailing, and the pier presented the busy and animated appearance incidental to the occasion.

The detective first made use of the badge, which he wore concealed under the lapel of his fashionable overcoat, to assure himself that the couple booked as Mrs. Mountjoy and Maid had not yet arrived on board the vessel.

He then took up a commanding position nearly in the center of the pier, and, in a negligent attitude, as if nonchalantly looking out for the appearance of some anticipated arrival, swept the animated space with his critical and discriminating glance.

Voyagers were already arriving singly, in couples and in squads, and there were leave-takings going on here and there amid the bustle and confusion, both on the dock and at the gangways, but with no sign as yet of the important pair.

He was not long, however, in discovering that he was probably not alone in his watch.

Three or four suspicious-looking men and one woman of the same stamp, all of whom he recognized as members of the criminal gang to which Preacher Walsh and Sam Raretton belonged, had also taken up points of observation, and were seemingly on the alert.

"The deuce!" thought Falconbridge; "this may so alarm our intending absconders as to beat my game completely. Perhaps it would have been better to have my Preacher Walsh disguise. However, something must be done to create a diversion among these expectant cormorants."

He looked at his watch. Only half an hour to spare! It was evident that the fugitives were intending to wait for the very last minute before boarding the steamer; and, in that case, these spies, who were doubtless bent on being bought off, might occasion such a disturbance as would enable them to slip over the plank when it would be too late to follow them.

At this juncture, Rickey, a well-known river-front police detective, with whom Falconbridge was on excellent terms, fortunately made his appearance on the dock.

The Falcon Detective lost no time in making himself known to the official, and putting him in possession of the chief features of the situation.

"Your way out of the difficulty is simple enough, though you haven't too much time to spare," Mr. Rickey cordially came to the rescue with. "Pick a fight with one of the crooks—Shang Weston, that big bank-sneak yonder, with the new stove-pipe and red neck-tie, will do to begin with—and leave the rest to me!"

Falconbridge was warmly thankful for his companion's suggestion, which he at once proceeded to put into practice.

A moment later, after separating from Rickey, and taking up a position directly in front of the crook indicated, he suddenly stepped back so as to bring his boot-heel down upon the fellow's toes with a devastating scrunch.

Instantly there was a yell of agony, a torrent of profanity, an exasperated punch in the back of the detective's neck, and then, as the latter indignantly wheeled, the men were at once engaged in fistcuffs.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A GAME OF CHANCE.

THE detective was careful not to knock his man out on the spot, and instantly the crook's confederates, even including the female, grouped around the fighters, with the evident intention of hustling the dude, as they imagined the stranger to be.

"Give it to him for his mamma, Shang!" growled one, getting a surreptitious dig into the detective's short ribs.

"What was it, Shang?" cried another, with like officiousness. "Was the dandy bloke tryin' to rob yer?"

"It's my poor honest husband the swell chromo is punching!" wailed the woman, striking out with her parasol. "Do assist my husband, kind gentlemen!"

The pace was now too hot to admit of more shamming on the part of Falconbridge.

"Thieves! robbers! a conspiracy!" he yelled out, at the same time astonishing his immediate opponent with a sudden development of pugilistic science such as sent him flying headlong into a coil of cable-rope. "Police! Help!" And at each added exclamation a fresh crook bit the dust, while the woman, in recoiling with over-haste, went head over heels across a baggage-truck in a manner more exemplary than exhilarating.

"What's all this?" exclaimed Rickey's gruff voice close at hand. "A gentleman waylaid by professional crooks in broad daylight. Snatch 'em up, officers, every blasted son of a gun of 'em!"

A rush followed on the part of the two policemen, whom the river-front detective had thus opportunely brought upon the scene, and in a twinkling all the gang were in custody.

"I shall call and make complaint during the morning, sir," said the seeming dude, passing a bit of bristol-board to Rickey. "Here is my card. Thank you kindly for rescuing me from the clutches of these desperate men."

"That is all right, sir," returned Rickey, with an amused shrug of his shoulders. "But, Gad! it seemed to me you were rescuing yourself after a way of your own."

He then strolled on, dispersing the crowd that had gathered, while the entire delegation from Crookville were unceremoniously hustled off by the officers, in spite of their protestations which were loud, shrill and deep.

But the ruse, though successful in the main, had not been without its disadvantage to Falconbridge.

He was still readjusting his somewhat disordered fine clothes when he became conscious of a startled look directed at him from a pair of eyes on the opposite side of the pier.

They belonged to a superbly handsome woman, richly dressed in black, who, together with another woman, seemingly an inferior, with a half-vail covering the upper part of her face, was just alighting from a public coach, from the outside of which a couple of porters were dislodging some bulky luggage in hot haste, for the steamer's last bell was ringing as a signal for "All aboard!"

In an instant the detective realized that the critical point in the game of chance was at hand.

Those were Fanny Elmore's eyes, and that she had penetrated his disguise in that single startled glance was as certain as the fact that she possessed them!

As Falconbridge pushed his way through the hurrying throng in her direction, without his eyes once quitting her and her companion, he perceived her startled expression give way to one of resolute desperation, while she seemed to be addressing some hurried words not only to her companion, but also to the two dockmen, or porters, great powerful fellows of sufficiently reckless aspect.

"All aboard!" was roared for perhaps the dozenth time from the gangway at the further end of the pier.

"Mrs. Mountjoy" and her companion were now standing like statues, while the porters, in lieu of hurrying forward with the trunks, as might have been expected, were now only trifling with them, their heads bowed as if under pretense of deciphering the labels.

"I perceive that you know me, ma'm," said the detective, his stern voice ringing out sharply as he strode up to Miss Elmore, looking directly into her cold and dauntless eyes.

She made no answer.

Then, with the rapidity of lightning, he grasped her companion's wrist with one hand, while stretching out the other to tear aside the concealing vail, at the same time exclaiming:

"The game is mine at last!"

"Not yet, detective hound!" Fanny suddenly hissed, in reply. "The winning card is still in the pack. Now!"

The pretended maid had shrunk violently back, thus evading the attempt to unmask her, and, at the same instant, while Fanny struck back the detective's grasp with all her might, the two dockmen suddenly darted forward, their heads lowered like charging bulls, and collided with his frame with a tremendous shock.

Though not quite overthrown, Falconbridge's hold on Fanny's companion was permanently dis-

engaged, and he was sent staggering back several paces.

Recovering himself in an instant, he threw himself upon his burly antagonists with indescribable fury, while, at the same time, shouting for Rickey to come to his assistance.

But, the river-front special was no longer within call, and Fanny's mysterious companion was already taking advantage of this diversion in her favor by springing back into the coach, whose driver was gathering up the lines from his seat on the box as if warned beforehand of such a possible emergency.

"All aboard for the last time!" was thundered from the steamship's gangway.

Frenzied at the thought of his prey escaping him at this longed-for and critical pass, Falconbridge at last succeeded in flooring the dockmen, one after the other, in stunning succession, and was almost at the coach-door, when Fanny suddenly hurled herself against him with such violence that he tripped over a chain, and fell prostrate on his side before he could recover his balance.

He was up again almost instantly, but by that time the coach was being driven off the pier at a breakneck pace and an excited crowd, having no idea of the real situation, were surging across the line of pursuit.

Fanny Elmore pointed her gloved hand at the baffled detective with intense scorn.

"Who wins the game now?" she demanded in her low, taunting voice.

CHAPTER L. KENO!

BEFORE the detective could reply to the taunt, a familiar cry greeted his ears; then Tommy Dodd was perceived writhing his way through the crowd, waving something which he held in his hand.

"Way, there, for that boy!" shouted Falconbridge, in his most authoritative manner, while displaying his badge. "I've the law on my side!"

The faithful lad reached him, and thrust into his hand the Cincinnati letter.

Falconbridge tore it open, and the coveted photograph was before his eyes!

Partly anticipative as were his consequent emotions, they were as nothing to the revelations that now rushed over his thoughts like a river, powerful in its sweep, clarifying in its crystal flow, irresistible in its mighty rush.

The dark was as light, the obscure as clear, the doubt as a certainty, the heart of the mystery as an open book lettered in staring flame.

Why had he not suspected this from the first?

"Quick, boy! a vehicle, a swift conveyance, at any cost!" Falconbridge exclaimed to his Ariel in a sort of breathless gasp.

As the lad disappeared in obedience to the order, he caught the woman by the wrist in his iron grasp.

"Look, wretch, look!" he cried, flashing the photograph before her startled eyes. "The picture that incriminates *you*, no less than its clever original! It is here—the proof, the deep, damning proof that must be laid at your door alike!"

White as a ghost, Fanny started back, a shriek frozen upon her lips.

The secret of the mysterious masquerade, the baffling cheat, was indeed at an end.

The portrait of her criminal first lover, Albert Delaine, was likewise the counterfeit presentation of the master hypocrite, Frank Parsons, alias Franks, the thieves' fence-agent!

But for an instant did the triumphant detective revel in the guilty woman's discomfiture.

"Keno! to your false play now!" he cried, casting her from him, as a shout from Tommy Dodd on the outskirts of the wondering crowd apprised him that the demanded conveyance was in readiness.

At the same time Rickey, leading a police rush, forced his way to the spot, and took into custody the two dockmen, as they were struggling to their feet, and whose interference he had noted from a distant part of the pier, and the great ocean steamer was seen to part from her moorings and float out majestically into the stream.

But, the detective was not to have an unalloyed triumph.

Recovering from her temporary shock, Fanny Elmore was upon him like a tigress as he turned away, one gloved hand at his throat, the other clutching for the photo.

"Give it me!" she hoarsely screamed. "The portrait—give it me, or I will kill you!"

He disengaged himself with as little violence as was necessary, thrusting the coveted picture into his pocket.

"Do not arrest the woman," he said to Rickey. "Her self-humiliation should be punishment enough for her, at least for the present."

Then he rushed toward the coach that Tommy had got in readiness, piercing the thick hedge of spectators like a knife.

"Here, boss, here you are!" yelled the lad. "In with you!"

"To—" ordered Falconbridge, giving the coachman the Bordens' address. "Five times your fare if you make it without interruption!"

Then he was in the coach at his assistant's side, and the team was off at the utmost pace which the law allowed.

Tommy looked back.

"She's nabbed a coach, too!" he exclaimed. "She's after us like a thousand of bricks, boss!"

"No matter," replied the detective, his calmness now thoroughly restored. "Fate is in this wind-up, and I feel it in my bones that she is on my side at last."

"Boss!"

"Yes, my lad."

"Don't those words of Lucy Windham's yesterday come onto you with a sort of queer rush now?"

"Let me see; what were they?"

"They were these, boss: 'A man performed this swell job, and yet when you catch the masquerading woman the man will be virtually in quod.'"

"Yes, yes; she was shrewder than we. A man is, indeed, at the bottom of it all, Tommy, and a perfect Lucifer at that!"

They drew up before the Borden cottage just as Hal Borden was reaching home from the hospital in Susie's company, while Janet was at the door with a startled face.

"You're just in time, Mr. Falconbridge!" cried the Express messenger's wife. "Janet says the Being, though no longer dressed precisely after my model, darted in here and disappeared upstairs not two minutes ago."

The detective's sole answer was a terrible laugh as he bounded up-stairs in his turn.

There was a crash, and then he had burst into Parsons's room like a hurricane.

The master-trickster was unmixed and in the toils.

He had, in fact, only partly disengaged himself from his feminine attire.

He turned with an oath, desperate and at bay, his ready knife flashing in his hand.

But the detective's rush was as the panther's upon its prey, stealthy, yet deadly, irresistible in conquering power.

Away flew the dagger, and the next instant the scoundrel was on his back on the bed, the handcuffs on his wrists.

Then a swift search of his person was successful, and the stolen money-package, subsequently found to be intact, was in the non-pairl detective's possession!

Fanny Elmore reached the house five minutes later, but only in time to see her lover led away to prison.

"She had, however, recovered her extraordinary nerve.

"Don't lose heart, Albert!" was her calm counsel. "While there's life there is hope, and I shall stand by you."

CHAPTER LI. CONCLUSION.

AFTER the exceptionally clever scoundrel and desperado, Albert Delaine alias Frank Parsons, alias Mr. Franks, et al., had been tried, convicted and sentenced to a long term of State's Prison servitude (for, strange to say, he escaped the capital offense, the murder of Jake Gunter never being conclusively proven against him,) a partial self-confession of his extraordinary criminal career was made public.

Not the least interesting portion of this, as may readily be supposed, and a portion, too, which perhaps Inspector Byrnes, no less than the Falcon Detective, found especially instructive reading, was the detailed account of the manner in which he had so long and successfully masqueraded as the mysterious woman and Susie Borden's double in the case which at last secured his downfall and punishment.

It seemed that from boyhood the man had occasionally assumed female attire from a species of Sardanapalian fascination which it possessed for his imagination. This enabled him to carry out the fiction with extraordinary success, and suggested to him the use which he had made of it in carrying out his murderous assault upon Borden and the consequent robbery.

It will only be necessary to describe one of the most difficult incidents of his method—that, for instance, where, after going upon an errand to Headquarters for the inspector, he was still enabled to enact his feminine part, and also to resume his proper character, with such rapidity and dexterity.

This was accomplished by his having a secret lodging-room on Third avenue, but a short distance around the corner from the Borden residence, where he kept his imitation of Susie's street attire in duplicate, and by his expertise in making the changes, in which he had become as much of a proficient as any lightning-change artist of the variety stage.

It also turned out by this confession, which was admirably frank so far as it went, that jealous hatred had actuated his assault upon Borden quite as much as the desire for gain. He had long cherished a passion for the messenger's wife, and doubtless imagined that, with the husband permanently eliminated, he might be enabled to win her as his wife; though exactly how he had figured out such a possible result, with Fanny Elmore as a remaining obstacle to its accomplishment, was not made very clear.

Perhaps he would have contrived her murder, as an afterthought!

It was only after finding himself more seriously injured by his self-inflicted, trick-supporting wound than he had bargained for that he seemed to have resumed his confederate relations with her, though it was without doubt that she was more or less in his intimate secret confidence from the very first.

Fanny's jealousy, and the general embarrassment which she underwent, will, in the light of these revelations, be distinctly understood.

As to the mystery in her own life, together with the fact which was still unexplained with regard to her association with Delaine and others of his ilk, she alone could have afforded any enlightenment, and her lips remained sealed.

She went abroad, soon after her lover's conviction, and was not heard of definitely thereafter; though it is supposed that she is leading a life for which she is thoroughly equipped—that of an unprincipled adventuress at large—among the continental capitals of Europe.

Janet and Jim Latham were happily married, and are now enjoying life in a pretty little up-town flat. They have three children, two boys and a girl, named respectively Borden, Falconbridge and Susie. Janet fought hard to have one of her little sons named Donald Brae Latham, but her husband sturdily contested the point till he finally carried it. He insisted, and with some reason, that there was an outlandish suggestiveness of wild Highlanders and flashing two-handed-swords in the name that would never answer for a God-fearing, law-abiding community.

As for Donald himself, Janet receives occasional letters from him, in which he expresses himself as moderately content with his sheep-farm existence in the lordly shadow of Ben Nevis, and in the continued possession of the historic and ancestral claymore that flashed so gloriously at Culloden, and not less conspicuously, though with hardly the same sanguinary success, in Central Park and the waiting-room of the Grand Central Depot.

Falconbridge was happy at being able to redeem his word with the Cosmopolitan Express Co., by which his arduous services were amply rewarded; and he is still in the private detective business at the old stand, with the noteworthy and indefatigable tragedian in miniature, Tommy Dodd, his continued little right bower, as a matter of course.

Hal Borden is still a trusted messenger of the Express company, at an advanced salary, and Susie Borden, secure in her husband's love, and in her no longer mystery-haunted home, is once more a happy wife, with her past sufferings and tribulations as nothing more than the phases of an evil dream.

THE END.

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- 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
- 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
- 97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
- 101 The Man from New York.
- 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
- 130 Captain Voicano or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
- 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
- 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 320 The Gentle Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
- 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
- 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Detective
- 370 The Dusty Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
- 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
- 440 The High Hope of the Pacific.
- 461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
- 465 The Actor Detective.
- 475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
- 490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
- 497 The Fresh in Texas.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

- 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail. By Ned Buntline.
- 518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred. By J. W. Osborn.
- 519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger. By J. C. Cowdrick.
- 520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo. By Albert W. Aiken.
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